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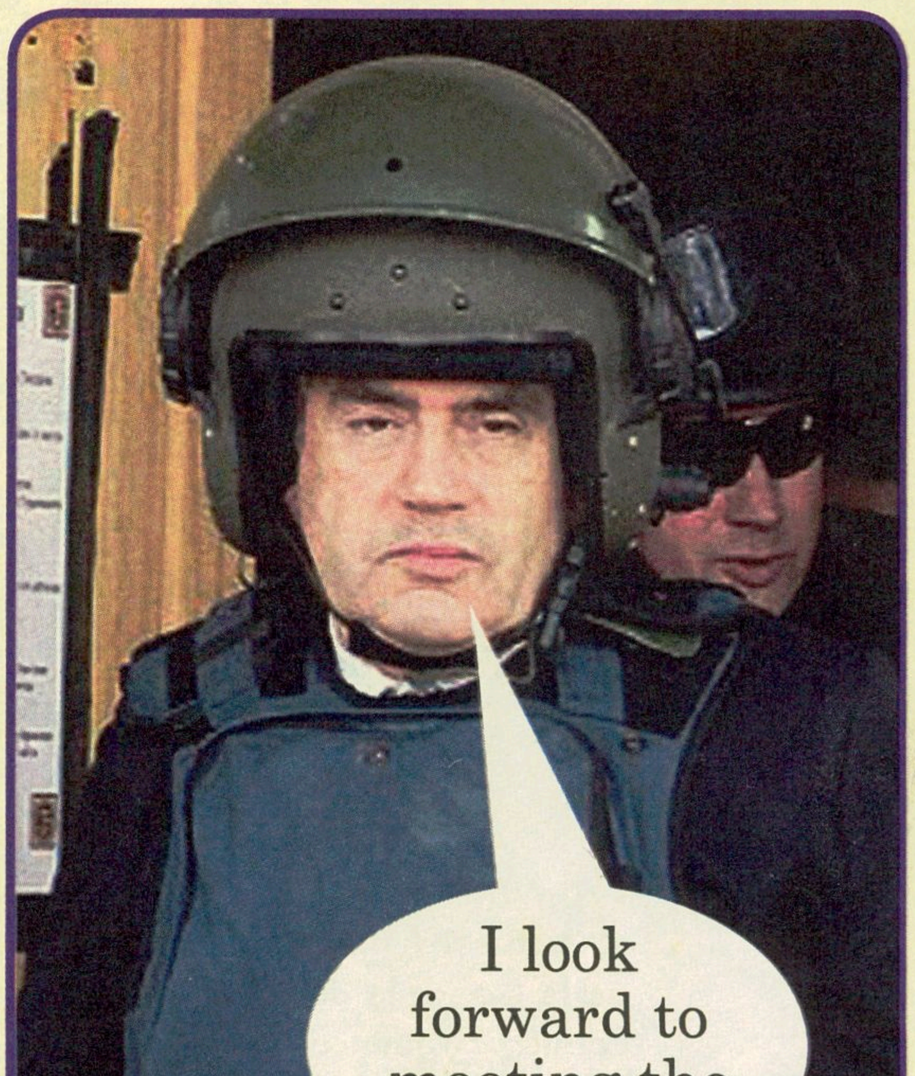
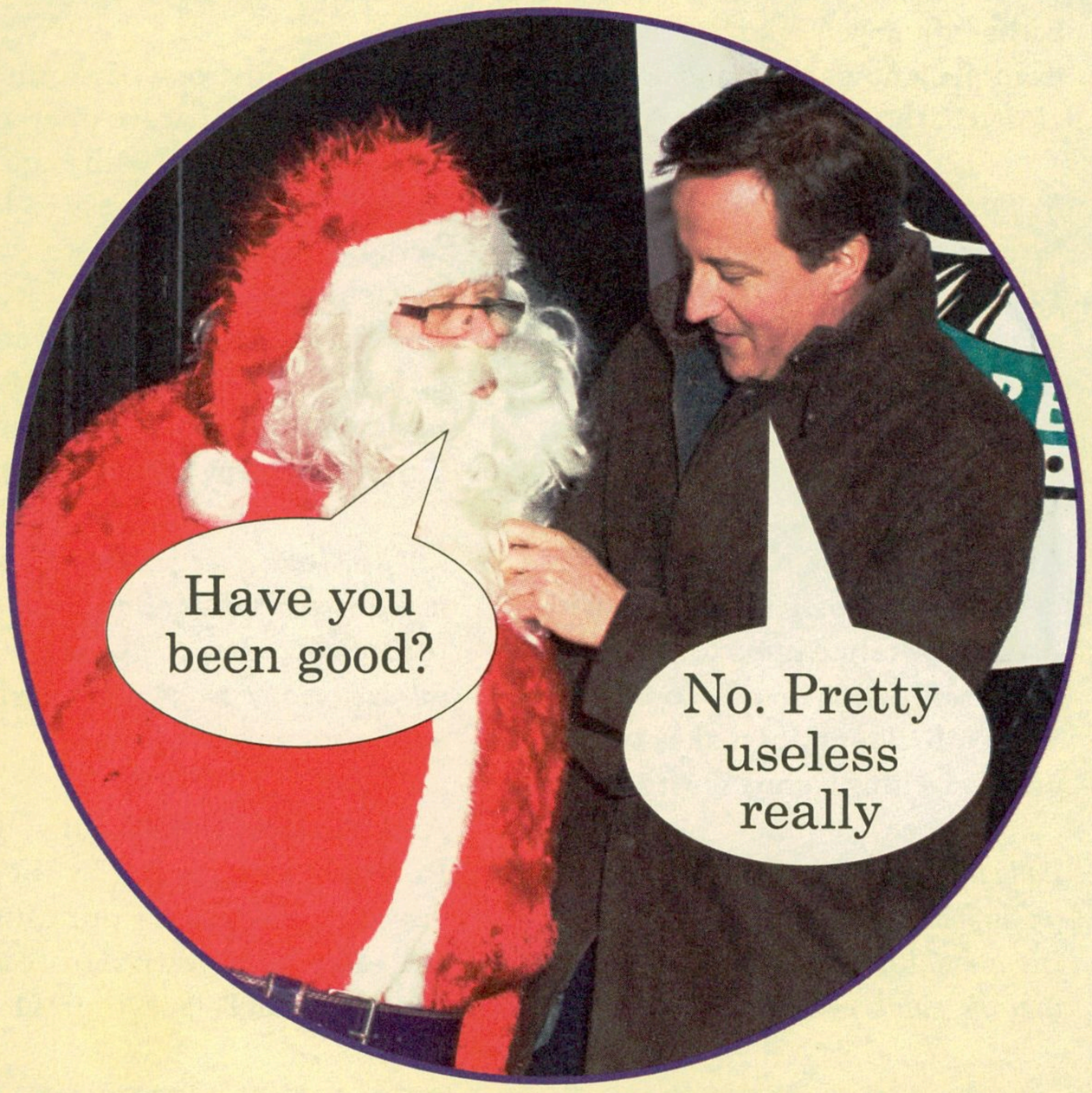
THE GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS

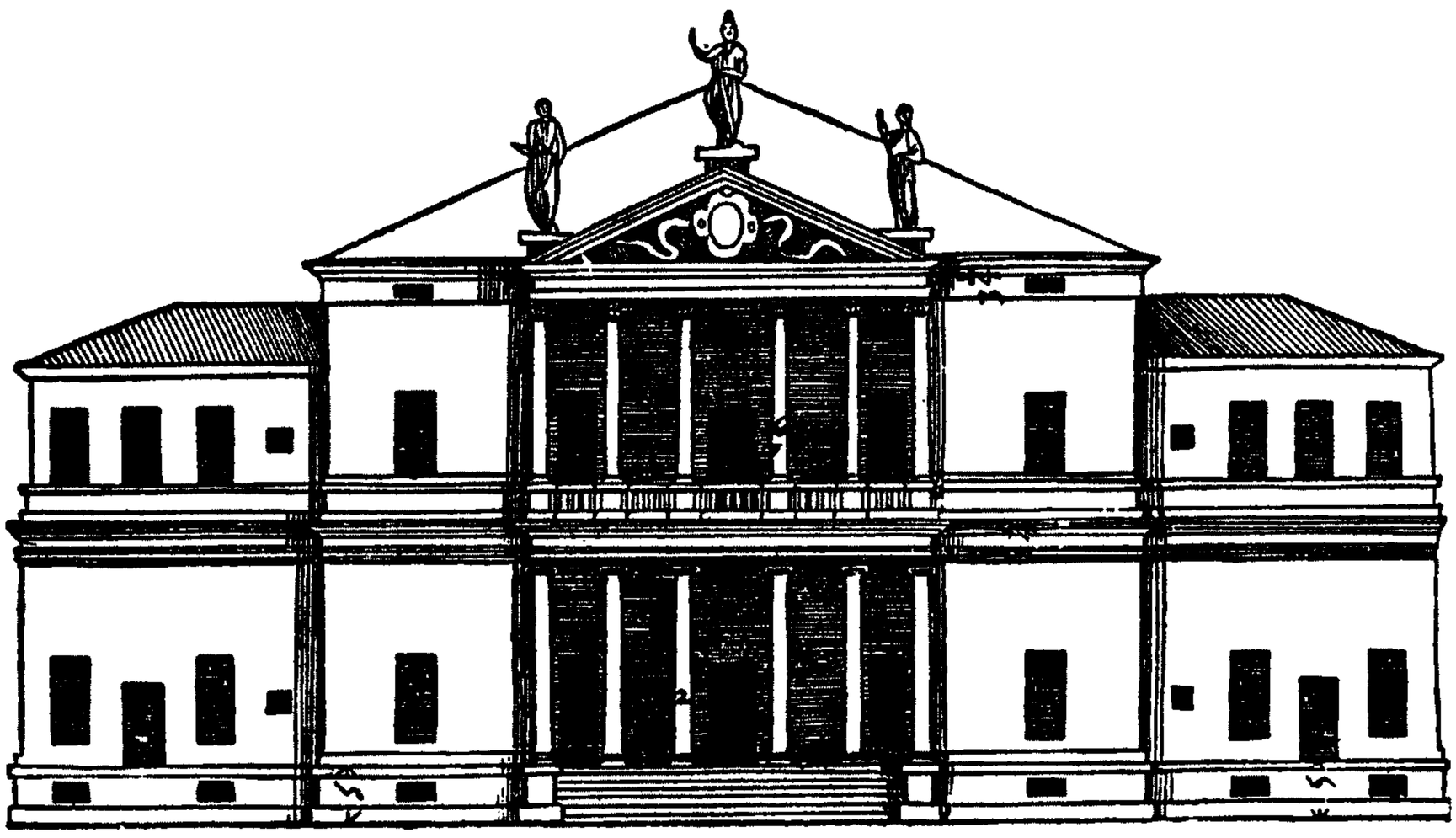
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE





HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR LEADERS
(SURELY 'READERS'? ED)

COULD THIS BE THE ULTIMATE VILLA HOLIDAY?



Plan of the Villa Cornaro from Palladio's *I Quattro Libri dell' Architettura* 1580

AROUND 1540, a young Italian mason named Andrea di Pietro della Gondola designed his first country residence, and in doing so began a career that profoundly altered Western architecture.

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And one final thought: if you find Palladio's Villas is full by the time you call, why not try our Music in Palladian Villas festival instead? Or The Venetian Palaces tour? Or... †

If you prefer your architecture more ancient, here are highlights of our North West Iran tour: Day 1: Direct flight to Tehran. Day 2: Tehran, visit the National Museum. Day 3: drive to the Mausoleum of the Mongol Oljeitu, completed in the 14th century. Day 4: Hamadan, explore the city known in classical times as Ecbatana. Day 5: see the Parthian remains at Kangover—Bisitun, with inscriptions of Darius the Great's victory over the Medes. Day 6: view remains of Achaemenid and Mongol architecture at Takht-e Suleiman. Day 7: Tabriz, the Azerbaijan Museum and 15th century Blue Mosque. Day 8: excursion to the breathtaking church of St Stephanus, Jolfa. Day 9: Ardabil, the spectacular Mausoleum of Sheikh Saffi-eddin. Day 10: the 12th-century Friday Mosque in Qazvin, the capital of Safavids under Shah Tahmasp. Day 11: Tehran, visit the Abguineh Glass and Ceramics Museum. Day 12: return flight to Heathrow.

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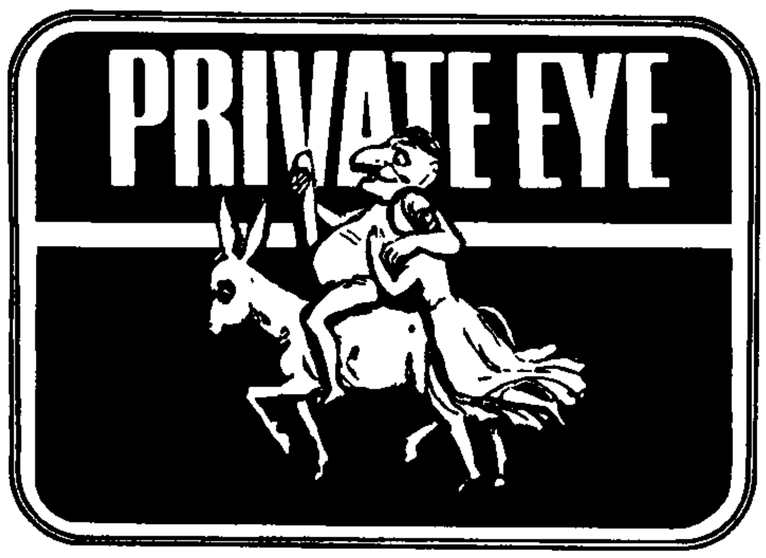

Shocking fillers

- Grand Private Eye Christmas Quiz 14
- Christmas cartoons – we've got 'em 18, 27
- It's Unity! Gnome Christmas Mart 20, 21
- Harold Pinter's Christmas number ones 28
- Books: The 2008 Log Rolling Awards 29, 30
- Plus a bumper £250 prize crossword 34

CUT 'N' WASTE

GOVERNMENT plans to slim down the private and public sector fat cats prompt the obvious question: how did they get so fat in the first place? Answer: years of over-feeding by *Gordon* Brown.

The tax designed to stop bankers' bonuses stands in sharp contrast to previous staunch defences of big bonuses. In response to outrage over City fat-cattery in 2004, Brown told parliament: "I think it is sometimes forgotten that bonuses are a big source of extra income tax." But that was when he was keen to fuel the bankers' excesses for the sake of a few hundred million in tax in a catastrophic effort to cling on to his own reputation for fiscal responsibility.

Also targeted now is what Brown calls the public sector "culture of excess", which sees hundreds of senior public servants paid more than the prime minister. And who ushered in this culture in 2002 by approving top civil service pay up to £180,000 so that more "talent" could be brought in from the private sector (to no discernable benefit), with subsequent rises well above inflation enabling mandarins to trouser £240,000 a year? Step forward chancellor at the time, Gordon Brown.

Curse of Brown

LAST Monday Gordon Brown congratulated Southeastern Trains on its new high-speed rail link, which had been running part-time since September with no problems whatsoever.

As the PM said: "This is a momentous day in the long and glorious history of British railways."

Slightly less gloriously and momentously, *the very day* after Gordon's speech, the line suffered catastrophic delays thanks to a power-line problem outside St Pancras, delaying passengers for up to three hours. The Curse of Brown strikes again…

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ABC

Headless corpse accused in court

Bedfordshire on Sunday

CHILCOT HUNDREDS

MORE on the business interests of witnesses to the Chilcot inquiry who have done rather well from the Iraq war (see last *Eye*).

Iraq is currently dishing out oil contracts to foreign firms and BG Group, the former British Gas, is bidding for some of them. BG Group's directors include Sir David Manning, former adviser to Tony Blair and one of the architects of the war who was called up to give evidence to Chilcot. Though BG Group has yet to win a contract, it will no doubt be encouraged by the fact that BP, which employs fellow Chilcot witness Sir Jeremy Greenstock, once second in command of the Coalition Provisional Authority, has already won its Iraq oil bid.

PFI PLUM DUFF

CHRISTMAS came early for Britain's private finance initiative industry thanks to one of the quieter announcements in Alistair Darling's pre-budget report.

No sooner had a former Treasury adviser sat before a parliamentary committee and denounced the government's accounting for PFI as "subterfuge" (see last *Eye*), than the scheme was given a huge boost by the creation of another body, Infrastructure UK (IUK), to promote it. So much for the money-saving bonfire of the quangos.

The new body will "develop a strategy for the UK's infrastructure over the next five to 50 years", covering roads, railways, hospitals and green investments and "building on the success [sic] of PFI/PPP [public private partnerships]". IUK will incorporate the Treasury's PFI policy team and the bulk of Partnerships UK, the privatized Treasury PFI taskforce which, ironically, will be re-nationalised.

Earlier this year the Treasury rigged the national accounting rules so that PFI liabilities remain out of the country's debt figures. Thus these industry heavyweights can ensure a heavyweight subterfuge continues for a while yet.

SCROOGE YOU

JOBCENTRE Plus bosses have banned managers from giving out Christmas "flexi-credits" to staff as a reward for high performance during the year.

Many other parts of the Department for Work and Pensions have been permitted to gift frontline workers a few hours of flexi-time, perhaps to be used for taking a longer lunch break with colleagues or an early finish for Christmas shopping. But JobCentre chiefs claim there is "no provision" for line managers to dish out the credits – even though they did it last year and many staff have the emails to prove it.

The Scroogery is particularly galling as it comes just a week after JobCentre Plus staff were named Civil Service Team of the Year, thanks to their handling of a massively increased workload caused by the recession.

COMMUNITIES

"This book draws upon original and multi-disciplinary research into the operation of the 'public sex community' to highlight the unacknowledged battle being waged between the law enforcement and the cruising, cottaging and dogging communities." – *Routledge publishers*

LISBON TREAT

BRENDA has let it be known via her lawyers that she does not want her family to be harassed by Her Majesty's press corps during the Christmas hols and will take a dim view of any long-lens intrusion into their privacy. But is Brenda's own granddaughter listening?

On the very day that news of HM's warning emerged, Zara Phillips was invading her own privacy by giving a lengthy interview about her holiday plans to the "Home" section of the *Sunday Times*. Phillips posed for the cameras at the CampoReal Golf Resort in Portugal, revealing that she has invested in a villa on the site and will holiday in the hotel's "royal suite" until work is completed.

The paper admitted Phillips was "terrifically vague" when asked if she was paying the going rate to buy one of the 380 villas, which sell for upwards of £590,000 each. But after a few more puff pieces like this about her holiday hideaway, who could be surprised if CampoReal gave her a right royal discount?

ETON DISORDER

NEWLY installed as political editor of the *Sun*, Tom Newton Dunn has wasted no time embedding himself with the Tories (see last *Eye*) now that his paper has pledged allegiance to them at the next election.

Newton Dunn, whose father used to be a Tory MEP but is now a Lib Dem, was particularly exercised by the prime minister's dig that David Cameron's policy on inheritance tax had been dreamed up on the playing fields of Eton. "Furious MPs later insisted the line was a cheap dig at Mr Cameron's education at the top boarding school to play up to prejudices against 'toffs'," Newton Dunn wrote on 3 December, claiming that Gordon Brown's jibe would be seen as a "gaffe".

He returned to the story four days later, this time in a sycophantic interview with Cameron. "The whole country has moved on from that kind of stuff, people aren't interested in it," the Tory leader opined. "It's rather sad, petty and spiteful – but I don't think it's effective."

Clearly the Tories want to dismiss this before it has "traction" with the electorate. And clearly they picked the right man in Newton Dunn. Like so many of the rising generation of lobby correspondents – Patrick Hennessy of the *Telegraph*, James Landale of the BBC and the *Times*'s new political editor Roland Watson – he was educated at Eton.

NEWS

EADY PIECES

THE HOPE that senior judges are about to cut England's censor-in-chief down to size is growing among lawyers, who are watching agog as the law's big guns move on to Mr Justice Eady's lawn.

Inevitably, the case where they see a showdown looming with Eady is the British Chiropractic Association's libel action against the science writer Simon Singh, which has helped to inspire a fightback against the English law's attacks on freedom of expression from writers, publishers, scientists, comedians, human rights groups, MPs and the United Nations.

As the *Eye* reported, Eady placed the most extreme reading possible on Singh's allegation in the *Guardian* that chiropractors were "knowingly promoting bogus" therapies when they claimed they could treat asthma, ear infections and many other childhood illnesses. Instead of saying that Singh merely had to prove that there was no evidence the treatments worked – which he was happy to do – Eady insisted that Singh must prove that chiropractors knew they were useless but dishonestly peddled them anyway – an impossible task, because it would mean getting into the mysterious minds of alternative therapists.

Singh won the right to contest Eady's ruling in the appeal court. In ordinary circumstances, an argument about the disputed facts of a libel action would be beneath the dignity of senior judges more used to discussing the great issues of the human rights act and common law. But the master of the rolls, Lord Neuberger, insisted that he wanted to hear the case, and then the lord chief justice, Lord Judge, said he wouldn't mind joining his learned colleague on the bench too.

As the lord chief justice recently said he was unhappy that London had become the libel capital of the world and wanted parliament to change the law, and as an investigation ordered by Neuberger's predecessor into the extortionate cost of libel is due out next month, lawyers now await Singh's appeal in February with rapt attention.

● *See Libel News, p. 9*

SCIENCE LESSENS

DELIVERING the Romanes Lecture at Oxford University in February on "Science and our Economic Future", Gordon Brown left his audience of laboratory-botherers feeling reassured.

"Today let me first be absolutely clear that we will meet our ten-year commitment to maintain science spending… And let me also make clear: in meeting our ten-year commitment we will maintain the ringfence we have placed around science funding."

Reassuring words. But less than ten months on, hidden on page 110 of Alistair Darling's pre-budget report comes news that one of the government's cuts – sorry, "additional savings by 2012-13" – is £600m to be slashed from "higher education and science and research budgets".

But what about the ringfence, scientists rushed to ask Lord Drayson, the minister for science and innovation, via the highly scientific medium of Twitter?

"No impact on science ringfence as we are not changing spending this CSR [comprehensive spending review] period. 2010-2011 science budget unchanged," came the reply. Along with last week's announcement that the Science and Technology Facilities Council is cutting a quarter of its student grants and fellowships to cover existing shortfalls, this suggests 2011 looks a good bet for anyone who's ever wanted to pick up a second-hand white coat on the cheap. And that ten-year commitment Brown was "absolutely clear" about sticking to? It's better known as the Treasury's "Science & Innovation Investment Framework", and it runs until, er, 2014.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

GOVERNORS at London Metropolitan University are refusing to quit after two damning reports found the university had falsely claimed £36m in funding for more students than were actually at the university, after failing to keep track of those who dropped out or failed to sit their exams.

The Higher Education Funding Council has called on the governors and senior staff to "consider their position" and could withdraw funding to force them out.

The reports put much of the blame on Brian Roper, who stepped down as vice-chancellor in March. His retirement doesn't actually take effect until this month, however, and the university confirmed that "he remains an employee and will be until he retires."

Does that mean he has been receiving his £239,000 salary for doing nothing since March? "What he is earning now will be in the accounts" comes the reply. As the most recent published accounts are from 2007/08, this isn't very revealing. But perhaps it was cheaper to pay Roper to do nothing given what his time in charge has cost London Met.

Street of Shame

THE *Daily Mirror* was almost alone in the Street of Shame in welcoming the pre-budget report with its front-page headline "Bank You Darling!"

Backing the chancellor's plan for a 50 percent windfall tax on bank bonuses, the *Mirror* rejoiced that "Alistair Darling yesterday gave some early Christmas cheer – by bashing the bankers who dragged us to the brink of meltdown".

Trinity Mirror's own board of directors won't have enjoyed this banker-bashing. Chairman Sir Ian Gibson used to be senior non-executive director of, ahem, Northern Rock until its collapse in 2007, while another *Mirror* director is former Barclays banker Gary Hoffman, now chief executive of Northern Rock. Talk about dragging us to the brink of meltdown!

WITH the *Times* and *Sunday Times* losing more than £1m a week, Rupert Murdoch must be thankful for the *Sun* and *News of the World*, whose profits keep the rest of his papers in the UK afloat.

The red-tops also rake in cash through online gambling. The *Sun*'s Dream Team fantasy football for male readers and Sun Bingo, aimed at women, are both highly lucrative – especially Sun Bingo, which contributed £12m in the last financial year and is expected to rake in £15m in the current one.

Sun Bingo, launched online in 2006, has 250,000 registered players, but most play infrequently. Most of the profits are generated by a few thousand players, many of whom, judging by the time they spend on the site, are addicted to gambling. The *Sun*'s own research has found that the most active 6 percent, mostly middle-aged women in low and middle-income brackets, place 69 percent of all wagers. Some serious bingo addicts spend more than £50,000 a year. In September the grateful *Sun* treated its 50 biggest-spending players to a Mediterranean cruise.

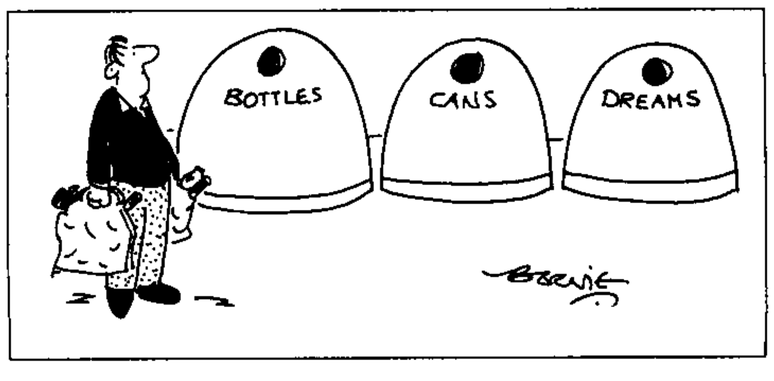
There is some unease within News International about all this because executives know that they are, essentially, exploiting addiction. There are token links to gambling addiction charities on the *Sun*'s website. But as Rupert Murdoch became addicted to making obscene amounts of money long ago, it is unlikely he can stop now.

LORD Rothermere has been paying close attention to recent upheavals at the *Daily Telegraph*, in which Will "Thirsty" Lewis was booted into a non-specific "digital" job so that his deputy Tony Gallagher could take over as editor.

The owner of the *Mail* newspapers has made no secret of his frustration at Paul Dacre's refusal to consider that there can ever be another editor of the *Mail* but him. Since Dacre has forced out anyone with a spark of originality and surrounded himself with mediocrities, Rothermere has already hinted to colleagues that he will have to look outside for the next *Mail* editor.

Where better than the *Maily Telegraph*, which is now a *Daily Mail* in all but name? And who better than Gallagher? An experienced *Mail* man who was forced to leave to gain the opportunities that Dacre denies everyone, he would be well-placed to make the journey from Victoria to Kensington.

But when will that moment come? Some *Mail* insiders predict that Dacre will retire to his Scottish estate after the general election when he is rewarded in the resignation honours list for slavish support of Gordon Brown. Others are less optimistic. One director at Associated rather unkindly refers to Dacre as "the Robert Mugabe of Fleet Street".



LAST Monday's *Daily Telegraph* revealed that the Anglican bishop to the armed forces, Stephen Venner, had said that one could admire the Taliban's "faith and sense of loyalty" while deploring their methods. "His comments in an interview with *The Daily Telegraph* came as the prime minister visited Afghanistan," it reported.

Not so. A clue to the genesis of the scoop lay in its byline – Jonathan Wynne-Jones, who is the religious affairs correspondent of the *Sunday Telegraph*, not the daily. He interviewed the bishop as long ago as 11 September and had tried ever since to interest his own paper in Venner's comments – but with no success. *Sunday Telegraph* editor Ian MacGregor, aka the Milky Bar Kid, didn't think it was much of a story. However, he also declined to let Wynne-Jones give it to the daily. "No, no more stories elsewhere," he insisted.

Clearly MacGregor was still smarting from the embarrassing episode in September when he spiked a piece by his health correspondent, Laura Donnelly, which revealed that doctors in Norfolk had refused to save the life of a premature baby because the mother was only 21 weeks and five days into her pregnancy. Donnelly posted the story on the *Telegraph* website instead, where it was noticed by the *Eastern Daily Press*, which turned it into a splash before the nationals ran with it the next day – including the *Daily Telegraph*, whose report was the very piece the Milky Bar Kid had rejected.

Having rebuffed Wynne-Jones for three months, last weekend MacGregor finally allowed him to offer the episcopal interview to colleagues at the daily paper – not thinking for a moment they'd be interested. They promptly ran it as a front-page splash. The bishop had to apologise, and Wynne-Jones received a herogram from new *Daily Telegraph* editor Tony Gallagher.

Poor Milky Bar Kid! He fancies his chances of succeeding Paul Dacre as editor of the *Daily Mail*, and has been hoping that regular games of squash with Lord Rothermere will help his cause. Now that he's been exposed not once but twice as a man who can't recognise a story even if it's served on a silver platter with watercress garnish, he may have to look elsewhere for preferment.

RICHARD "Dirty" Desmond's media empire may have cut ties with Katie Price – after her defection from *OK!* to rival *Hello!* – but that isn't stopping his papers from continuing to run front-page stories about Price and ex-lover Peter Andre which bear little resemblance to the truth.

"My sexy Xmas with new love," boomed the *Daily Star*'s "exclusive" splash on 15 December. "Hunky Peter Andre can't wait to spend Christmas with an 'elegant and classy' sexy new love."

Readers who bothered to turn to the full story inside discovered that there is no new love. In fact, Andre is "determined not to rush" to find a new partner and only expects to "be with someone this time next year".

TEMPERS are fraying at the cash-strapped *Evening Standard*, where hacks have been told to work even harder for their roubles as all available cash is diverted into bigger print-runs rather than wage packets.

Nineteen sub-editors are being made redundant. Meanwhile Steve McKenlay, the *Standard* and former *London Lite* sports editor, stormed out of the office screaming "this is tantamount to constructive dismissal", after being informed by managing editor Doug Wills that not just his title but also his salary were to be shrunk following *Lite*'s closure.

SHAMING OF THE SCREWS

NEWS INTERNATIONAL chief executive Rebekah Brooks is not remotely happy that she is to be hauled before MPs after Christmas to account for "inconsistencies" in the evidence of senior NI executives who were questioned about the *News of the World*'s phone hacking activities by the Commons culture, media and sport (CMS) committee in July.

Screws editor Colin Myler was put on the naughty step by Rebekah after *Eye* 1249 revealed how he had misled the Press Complaints Commission during its inquiry.

Myler, in his evidence to the PCC prior to its helpful whitewash of the *NoW* last month, laid a trail of smoke in his account of why a "junior reporter" had emailed a transcript of apparently illegally hacked phone calls for the attention of chief reporter Neville Thurlbeck in June 2005: "He [the "junior"] had been a reporter for only a week, having been promoted 'off the floor' where he had been a messenger…"

After the *Eye*'s story appeared, alert MPs on the CMS committee noticed how Myler's words had echoed almost word-for-word what the *NoW*'s legal supremo Tom Crone had testified in July: "About this time he had only just become a reporter; prior to that actually I think he had been a messenger and he was being trained up off the floor."

As the *Eye* pointed out re Myler's evidence, this was far from the truth, because the reporter concerned, Ross Hindley, aka Ross Hall, had previously had bylines in the *NoW* as far back as 2000.

Crone went on to tell the MPs: "The junior journalist is currently in Peru, I believe. It may be inconvenient but that is where he is. It has got nothing to do with us sending him there!… He is going around the world… He is 20 years old."

If Our Man Conveniently in Machu Picchu were indeed 20 in July 2009 (and thus 16 in June 2005), the "messenger boy" story would have been credible. In fact Crone had taken eight years off Hall's age. Now 28, he was 24 in June 2005 – an experienced young hack.

MPs on the committee, annoyed at the way they were misled, are going back over the evidence of Myler, Crone and other *NoW* executives in search of further inconsistencies. Rebekah is mad as hell. Not because her star witnesses were economical with the actualité… but because they were found out.

SANTA'S SACK RACE

THE *Eye* quoted Philip Hope-Wallace's advice to "never work for a liberal newspaper: they will sack you on Christmas Eve" in our last issue; but as it turns out the *Guardian* has come up with an even more exquisite torture for a number of its employees over the festive season.

Last week – on the very day hacks were beavering away on the last ever edition of the paper's Thursday Technology supplement – those IT staff who had not been culled in the latest round of job cuts were told that the majority of their posts were to be outsourced. Managers, however, had yet to decide which of the various contractors with whom they were "in discussion" (Siemens? Crapita? A call-centre in Bangalore?) would be their bosses as of 2010. The *Guardian*'s postroom, security and switchboard were similarly outsourced when the paper moved to its shiny new offices a year ago. As a disgruntled techie whimpers to the *Eye*: "Everybody gets to go home for Christmas not knowing if they are being outsourced, or if they'll have jobs or not in the new year."

Meanwhile on the editorial floor, things are scarcely better. A recent email to all hacks pointed out that "Take-up on the voluntary redundancy scheme remains low and it is due to close on 31st December. We still need to make significant headcount savings of up to £5m. This is the equivalent of 10 percent of the salary bill… We will be holding meetings in every department in January to talk this through in more detail. In the meantime Alan [Rusbridger] will also be meeting staff in various departments between now and Christmas to talk about our strategy."

Since the NUJ chapel at the paper has a long-standing policy that any compulsory redundancies will result in an automatic strike ballot, and with the looming election likely to return a Conservative government committed to cutting all paid-for print advertising for public sector jobs, long the *Grauniad*'s economic lifeline, 2010 is shaping up to be a very interesting year for the paper. Merry Christmas everyone!

PS: The same week saw the launch of the *Guardian*'s iPhone app, a new and even groovier method of giving away all their stories for free so no-one needs to buy the paper. iTunes warns that the app is rated 12+ for "Infrequent/Mild Mature/Suggestive Themes" and "Infrequent/Mild Horror/Fear Themes", and advertises it as leaving users "one click away from the *Guardian*'s award-winning journalists and columnists, including Charlie Brooker, Polly Toynbee, David Mitchell and George Monbiot."

Er, some mishtake, shurely? David Mitchell writes a weekly column for the paper's Sunday sister, doesn't he? Apparently not – for although the app will give away all the *Observer*'s content as well, the marketing blurb completely ignores the paper's existence.

PARTY TIME

DESPITE the general air of unfestive doom and gloom at Richard "Dirty" Desmond's redundancy-ravaged titles, the *Daily Star*'s reporting team set off for Fleet Street's famous tavern Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese for their Christmas shindig.

Gaining admission was the first problem. When the scribes called the pub to book a room they were initially told it was impossible due to a ban imposed on the *Daily Star* a few Christmases ago. Some excitable and thirsty *Star* partygoers had seemingly set fire to someone's trousers, and when the smoke cleared the waiting staff noted that many of the Victorian ladies featured in paintings around the pub had also acquired comedy moustaches made with black felt tip pen.

After promising to behave themselves this time, the hacks were let in. But they still managed to be asked not to come back, after reporter Tom Savage insulted the landlord by remarking loudly on what he saw as a great resemblance to Lurch of Addams Family fame. In his defence, the landlord's girlfriend retorted: "Well at least he doesn't look like an arsehole."

In marked contrast to his staff's goings-on at the Cheese, Dirty Des's 58th birthday bash on 8 December was an austere affair. His wife, Janet, had suggested that invited guests be required to part with £1,000 in readies as they cross the threshold. After all, anyone who reads Desmond's newspapers knows that the man who built his empire on low-grade porn now atones for his sins by presenting lots of charidee cheques. Alas, *Daily Star* editor Dawn Neesom was struck down with a mega toothache and unable to hand over her grand – sorry, unable to attend the party. In the statuesque Dawn's absence, deputy Keiron Saunders rolled back the years with some raging rows and bollockings. They culminated with a warning that "anyone who doesn't like my style of editing is welcome to come outside and discuss it further". Trebles of comfort and joy all round!

FUN AND games at the News International party, where hacks from the *Times* and *Sunday Times* were, for once, forced to rub shoulders with their grubby colleagues at the *Sun* and *News of the Screws*.

Sadly, there was little of the outrageous behaviour that has characterised their own separate bashes in previous years, though this may have had something to do with the presence of Rupert Murdoch among the partygoers.

Still, there's always one. Security staff were forced to have a stern word with one tired and emotional reveller who was sprawled on the sofa ignoring the regulations banning smoking on the premises. And who was it lighting up? None other than *Sunday Times* editor John Witherow.

If Witherow was chastened, he didn't show it as he proceeded to the dance floor to boogie on down with the young blondes from the Style magazine in a display of sad-dad strutting that might even have embarrassed his predecessor Andrew Neil in his heyday at Tramp.

STAFF at the Royal College of Psychiatry, looking forward to their annual Christmas knees-up, were dismayed to receive this solemn warning…

"We would like to point out that these events are organised as a work-related social event, and as such, the policies and procedures which govern your employment also apply to your conduct at these Christmas activities… the policies and procedures outlined in the Staff Handbook will apply... we would like to draw your attention to the following policies… Dignity at Work Policy (incorporating definitions of harassment, sexual harassment and bullying); Disciplinary Procedure... act in a responsible manner with regard to alcohol consumption… required to report for work the following day... hangover is an unacceptable reason for sickness absence."

Let the revels commence!

MORSE FOOL HIM

ON THE day last week that defence secretary Bob Ainsworth announced £1.5bn in spending cuts, the National Audit Office published the annual litany of delay and cost overruns that is known as the Defence Major Projects Report.

The cuts will mean the closure of an RAF base and thousands of job cuts, largely to fund 22 new Chinook helicopters and other equipment for Afghanistan. The 2008/09 report, meanwhile, reveals expected cost overruns up by £1.2bn, which would be enough to buy at least 30 Chinooks.

Most of the overrun was put down to decisions to delay certain projects (rather than get on with them or ditch them) in order to save cash from the over-committed budget in the short term but fork out much more later on. This, said auditor-general Amyas Morse, "gives a misleadingly negative picture of how well some major projects in the MoD are managed". But for dunder-headed political decisions, in other words, the MoD equipment programme would have looked pretty good.

Which is different from the conclusion reached a couple of months ago by Bernard Gray, the man brought in by the government to examine equipment buying. Although he too noted huge political failure, he also found "weak programme and project management skills" requiring urgent action.

One interesting difference between Gray and Morse is that until May this year Morse was the MoD's commercial director, with the job of providing "strategic leadership across the full range of MoD's acquisition, procurement and commercial activities". Now he has been called upon to examine his own handiwork, he's found it wasn't too bad after all. Marvellous!

BISHOPS MOVE

MEETINGS of the parliamentary ecclesiastical committee are usually sedate affairs, bordering on the soporific. There was no reason to suppose that the one at the end of November would be any different, as members discussed a non-controversial measure to end the requirement that two names be submitted to No 10 for each nomination of a suffragan bishop.

Suffragans are the lowest form of episcopal life, and since Gordon Brown said two years ago that he would as a matter of course accept the first name submitted for *diocesan* bishops, thus removing the prime ministerial veto over clerics he dislikes, this seemed a small change.

But then came an extraordinary intervention from Desmond Swayne MP, who objected strongly – and revealed that David Cameron did too. "As the leader of the opposition's PPS, I did ask him about this today and he is not content that this should be done." Although the prime minister has always chosen the first of two names submitted to him, "that does not mean that the choice was automatic".

Amid some consternation the Tory MP Robert Key – a member of the General Synod – got up and went round the room to remonstrate with his colleague. But Swayne persisted. He was the only member to vote against the measure.

What can it mean? Margaret Thatcher interfered in church appointments for political reasons, most famously when she blocked the liberal Richard Harries as Archbishop of Canterbury and gave the job to George Carey instead, largely because he'd once written a book called *The Church in the Marketplace*. The only conclusion one can draw from Swayne's bizarre performance is that Cameron intends to revive this Thatcherite tradition.

CALLED TO ORDURE

Lords-a-whinging

SNORTS, groans, moans. There was harrumphing a-plenty in the House of Lords when peers discussed proposed changes to their allowances. Not being elected, they felt little of the self-restraint shown by most MPs during the expenses scandal. They were narked and showed it.

Backbench peers do not receive a wage. Expenses and allowances are the only thing they get. Now the senior salaries review board has suggested that those payments should be altered, giving them a daily £200 bung instead of the old practice of a daily subsistence allowance of £86.50 and a £71.50 office costs allowance. It also proposed cutting the overnight stay allowance from £174 to £140.

Bill Cockburn, head of the senior salaries review board, came in for a personal pasting. Former Tory Welsh Secretary Lord Crickhowell complained that the board "misleadingly" suggested that peers received a net income of £30,000 before travel and overnight costs. "I would wager that Mr Cockburn does not include his secretary's pay and office costs in any statement of his own net income," Crickhowell grumbled.

Others were furious about a suggestion that although members will be allowed to continue claiming for first-class rail travel, their spouses will have to go second-class. "Your spouse will be in the guard's van," cried Lady Shephard (Con). She noted that the salaries review board did not contain a single woman. "I did not think that was legal," she said.

Many male peers said they didn't like to think what their better halves would say about having to go second-class while they themselves went first-class. Lord Sewel (Lab) said "delicacy prevented" him describing his wife's reaction.

Disabled peers may in future have to provide receipts to reinforce claims for mobility allowances. Labour's Lord Peston, who has a leg ailment ("my legs hurt but it is not a major disability") called this measure "one of the most appalling and nastiest" of the board's suggestions. As for the "second-class carriage" spouses suggestion, he said: "Although my wife and I row all the time, we actually like to be together. Some of us are very old-fashioned and like being with our spouses."

Peston, who happens to be the father of the BBC's Robert Peston, said he had "spent 10 years slogging my guts out on the opposition frontbenches at great personal cost. I do not think that, were I the same age again, I would remotely consider it my duty."

The current system allows some naughty peers to clock on for a few minutes and still be paid the full whack. Lord Palmer (Crossbencher) confessed: "Very few of us could put hand on heart and say we have never 'clocked in' for two minutes and then disappeared. In my 19 years I admit to having done so twice, and once was on my wedding day."

He added: "In the old days I remember being a teller in the Lobby at 3am when more than 400 Peers trooped through it. I wonder how many members of the senior salaries review board are awake and working at 3am."

Tempers were running high. Lord McNally, who was generally pro the board, was interrupted by Labour's Lord Gordon. McNally snapped that he should "make yer speech later".

Notoriously dull Lord Howe (Sir Geoffrey, as was) rose at the same time as the Lib Dems' almost equally unexciting Lord Greaves. "Howe! Howe!" chanted peers. Lord Howe: "I am not often greeted by a kind of Red Indian greeting."

Howe laconically commented that he was "exhilarated" and his wife, also a peer, would be better off under the board's proposals because they share digs. As he put it: "My noble kinswoman and I share the same dwelling most of the time." Most of the time, Geoffrey? You rogue!

Greaves, bearded and hippyish, said he was minded to "hitch to Westminster on a lorry and bring my tent and pitch it on College Green". Watch out, Brian Haw.

Meanwhile Earl Ferrers (Con) noted that if changes are made, the finance department (currently employing five people) expects to have to take on another eight and move to a bigger office "They become a huge additional cost which in turn becomes part of peers' expenses," he said in despair.

The year's expenses ructions at Westminster have left both MPs and peers bruised - and determined now to make sure quangocrats have every bit as much scrutiny of their perks. As Lord Palmer put it: "The cost to the taxpayer for this House is £3.81 a year. Unaccountable quangos with salaried members last year cost each and every UK household the staggering amount of £3,641 a year. I wonder who gives the better value."

Mind you, they could start at home. There are currently noises for the Speaker of the Lords, Lady Hayman, to be given a bigger role. She is currently paid £140,000 for sitting on the Woolsack and doing, well, almost nothing else in the Chamber. Why not just scrap the Lords Speakership and put the money towards some railway upgrades?

'Gavel Basher'

JACOB'S CLIQUE

ANOTHER clumsy bit of fakery by Jacob Rees-Mogg, Tory prospective parliamentary candidate for Somerset North East.

Last year he had to apologise after plagiarising a Trevor Kavanagh column in the *Sun* and passing it off as his own work in a newsletter. Now, under the heading "Honesty on the economy", the Somerset North East Conservative website carries a photograph of Rees-Smug chatting in the street to a fruity young woman, with the caption "Jacob talking to a lady in Midsomer Norton".

The impression is that old Etonian Jake is out and about meeting common Zummerzet folk and discussing the price of mangel-wurzels. In fact the fruity person in the picture is none other than Fiona Tyrrell, the London-based office manager of Rees-Mogg's City company, Somerset Capital Investment.

In another plug for Jacob's lacklustre candidacy in the *Times*, his father, that infallible pundit William Rees-Mogg, wrote in his column last week that Jacob was "popular". The last *Eye* revealed how David Cameron has been avoiding him recently. Are things now so bad for Jake he has to bus in staff to pose with him in photographs?

KRAFTY DEVILS

LORD MANDELSON, normally a champion of global free enterprise after his days as EU trade commissioner, has been surprisingly jingoistic as he backs the Willy Wonkas at Cadbury against a hostile bid from US food giant Kraft.

"If you think that you can come here and make a fast buck, you will find huge opposition from the local population and from the British government," said Mandy of the Kraft bid.

By happy coincidence, this patriotic defence of Cadbury is the same line being peddled by Roland Rudd, public relations adviser to the chocolate firm and long-standing chum of Lord Mandelson.

SELF SERVICE

CHRISTMAS spirit is in short supply this year in Cornwall, where local Tories have been accused of an underhand approach to fundraising.

In the St Ives constituency, where young strapper Derek Thomas has ambitions to unseat sitting Lib Dem MP Andrew George, the Helston chamber choir rehearsed for six weeks under the impression that it had been asked to take part in a Christmas charity concert for a local hospice. The singers, puzzled at the lack of publicity for the event, were astonished to discover last week that they were in fact preparing for a concert to raise money for the Conservative party and pulled out of the event.

The choir had been asked to sing for the "hospice" by Stephen Sobey, a member of the St Ives Conservative Association management committee. He has now offered his "sincerest apologies for my genuine mistake" – after initially accusing the choir's secretary of being "drunk" when *she wrote a furious letter of complaint.*

This is not the only apology made recently by the PR man Sobey, a former researcher for William Hague who became a UKIP spin doctor before returning to the Tories and working as an "international affairs adviser" to David Cameron.

Last month he upset villagers at Porthallow on the Lizard who had arranged a firework display to raise money for a much-needed new village hall. Local Conservatives just happened to hold their own fundraising "firework party" on the same night at a nearby house. The Tory event didn't actually have any fireworks, but the invitations said: "Porthallow village fireworks can be viewed from the front garden." Poor show.

LIBEL NEWS

"SCIENTISTS urge reform of 'lethal' libel law," thundered the headline over a *Times* report on how the libel law was endangering public health by stopping peer-reviewed research appearing in medical journals.

It quoted Dr Fiona Godlee, editor of the *British Medical Journal*, describing how one of the *BMJ*'s satellite magazines, *Archives of Disease in Childhood,* had turned down a paper describing clinical signs associated with child abuse. "These cases were all from the UK, and the information should have been readily available to doctors in the UK," she said. "Science and medical discussion must be open and critical."

But what was the paper that Dr Godlee feared might bring her colleagues the unwelcome attention of Carter Fuck and Mr Justice Eady? Perhaps fearing a writ of its own, the *Thunderer* coyly refused to say. The *Eye* can reveal that in 2007 Professor Neil McIntosh, from the Department of Child Life and Health at the University of Edinburgh, and his associates submitted an exhaustive review of 58,059 infants admitted to Scottish A&E departments.

They were looking for examples of nosebleeds and coughing up blood, and suggested that they were so rare among children under two that they could be signs of child abuse. They recommended that in future a paediatrician should check out children with nosebleeds, but were careful to add: "No children described in this report suffered injury from definite abuse that was sufficiently worrying to trigger child protection proceedings at the time of the injury."

Though no individual was named or accused, the lawyers went into a tizzy fearing that parents could sue the journal claiming the doctors were indirectly suggesting they may be abusers. That was enough of a chilling effect for the *Archives of Disease in Childhood* lawyers to stop publication.

Although it turned the paper down, *Pediatrics* decided that Professor McIntosh and his team had produced important work and published it. As its spelling suggests, *Pediatrics* is an American journal. Thus American doctors can read the results of a study of British children in British hospitals that British publishers dare not run.

'Ratbiter'

ECO-GNOMICS

THE government likes to boast of its efforts to safeguard UK species and habitats under its "biodiversity action plan", but how much progress has it made?

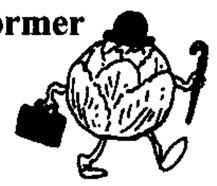
European Union targets on biodiversity expire next year; but, according to a recent parliamentary answer from Defra minister Huw Irranca-Davies, the government is "fully committed" to helping draw up a new and "challenging" post-2010 target and wants to contribute to the debate in Europe and further afield. "Within the UK we have published targets to increase the population and range of our priority species and restore and expand priority habitats by 2015," he said.

The minister referred his colleagues to the most recent assessment of the status of priority species and habitats on the website of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Alas, the site suggests the government has a long way to go before it can lecture other nations. Even using the government's own criteria, more than 50 percent of the indicators show either deterioration or no improvement.

The position of farmland birds, sea birds and wintering birds is deteriorating. In the case of all other birds, as well as butterflies, there has been no improvement. Woodland and grassland habitats have both deteriorated along with boundary habitats; and invasive species are on the increase. The single species to show any improvement at all is native cattle, which reflects the way that traditional farmers have been replaced by hobby farmers with City money and a soft-spot for the Highland cow.

On the plus side? Well, there is a rash of helpful ticks for Defra expenditure on biodiversity and a smattering of bureaucratic government schemes, but they are clearly not working. Something called "connectivity" is doing nicely - but having no beneficial impact on species. And "volunteering" is up too, which is just as well since the government appears to be doing so little. Aptly, the government's Biodiversity Research Action Group calls itself, er, "BRAG".

BRUSSELS SPROUTS



MARTA ANDREASEN, the former chief accountant of the European Commission who was sacked for highlighting the lack of financial control over the European Union budget, is continuing her campaign against EU profligacy from the floor of European parliament.

Speaking on 15 December in the second reading on the 2010 EU budget, she dismissed the proposal for a 6 percent increase on 2009 spending as being "from another planet" – one where there was no financial crisis.

Andreasen said the budget was drawn up without proper consultation and criticised the decision of MEPs to vote for taxpayers to fund their pay rises as "obscene" when so many citizens were losing their jobs. She also asked MEPs why they were calling for more money to be paid into the EU's structural and cohesion funds when these had been shown to contain the highest number of errors.

Claiming that the proposed budget would not cover the cost of implementing the Lisbon treaty (which would be made "through the back door"), she also pointed out that Britain's proposed cut in domestic spending – equivalent to €12bn – was the same as the country's contribution to the EU.

Last time Andreasen highlighted serious errors and lack of controls over the EU's multi-billion euro budget she was fired from her job in the commission for disloyalty. This time, now she is a UKIP MEP, she will simply be ignored.

CHRISTMAS IN HELMAND

THESE are hectic days in Helmandshire, that part of Afghanistan where a string of forward operating bases, open latrines and mortar pits will be for ever England.

Or maybe not. The US marines are now taking over – more than 10,000 of them, and no sooner did they have the thumbs-up from their commander-in-chief than they got down to business almost before dropping their kitbags off at their Garmsir base.

They are now driving into the poppy and wheat fields of Marjah and Nad e Ali, where the toughest local Taliban rob the people (often abetted by the Afghan police) and are making bigger and better bombs for roadside IED booby traps. The Brits have been itching to take this ground but just didn't have the numbers this summer. Once more there's a little less pink on the map.

In deepest Helmand, meanwhile, the price differential between wheat and dried opium this season is playing into the hands of the government and heavily against the Taliban. Wheat commands roughly twice the world price here, roughly $200 per ton as against just under $95 on the grain floors at Chicago and Winnipeg. The price of dried opium has crashed; from about $225 a kilo two and a half years ago, you are now lucky to get more than $90 a kilo in Kandahar. The problem is hyper-production – there is two years' worth of opium harvest in store now. Besides, it's getting hellishly problematic to sell the stuff and just plain hellish to grow it. It costs roughly $70 for hired labour to thin a Jerib (one fifth of a hectare) of poppy; $30 for the first go round and $40 the second time, and $300 a Jerib to harvest.

Then there are the risks and overheads, paying the middlemen, the warlords and gangsters and the Taliban tax. A further risk is Governor Ghulab Mangal's habit of ordering in his taskforce of 100 armoured tractors protected by ISAF (Nato's International Security Assistance Force) and Afghan army units which tear up fields just as the poppies are ready to cut and tap.

No wonder hundreds of farmers in Marjah gave two fingers to the Taliban at a recent Shura, telling their so-called "protectors" they needed to buy subsidised wheat seed and fertiliser from the government. The Taliban reluctantly agreed because they know that otherwise the farmers face ruin.

The farmers are now getting expert advice in the unlikely form of an NGO called Rift Valley Agriculture, whose members are a gang of Zimbabweans whose farms were taken off them by Mugabe's war veteran gangs. Their leader, Roy Watson, is a Giant Haystacks figure, a huge, silver-handled Colt automatic sticks out of his black XXX-Large body armour vest.

Roy and his oppo Farney Feirera are the Little and Large of the team. They are the supreme practitioners of Extreme Agriculture, going into the fields with the farmers, in the badlands of Marjah, and beyond the belts of IEDs at Musa Qala, to advise on crop husbandry, harvest and planting cycles, the application of fertilizer and herbicide. "They learn quickly, and are pretty damn good," Roy the Man Mountain says. "Wheat yields have gone up 30 percent in one year."

JUST FANCY THAT!

"I want to thank our forces involved in Operation Panther's Claw [Afghanistan] for what they are doing... they have the resources and equipment they need." – ***Gordon Brown, 15 July, after a lack of helicopters was blamed for deaths in Afghanistan***

"I am announcing today changes to the defence programme which will enhance the support to our personnel on operations in Afghanistan, worth £900m over the next three years." – ***Defence secretary Bob Ainsworth, 15 December, announcing much-needed equipment and helicopters for Afghanistan***

FIVE TV

Life (BBC1)
Delia's Classic Christmas (BBC2)
Can Gerry Robinson Fix Dementia Homes? (BBC2)
A History of Scotland (BBC2)
The Art of Russia (BBC4)
Seven Ages of Britain (BBC1)

QUIZZES are very popular at this time of year, so who is the odd one out among the presenters of the six factual programmes listed above?

If you want a bit of help, five of the hosts are Sir David Attenborough, Delia Smith, Gerry Robinson, Neil Oliver and Andrew Graham-Dixon, who have all had peak-time factual shows on a BBC channel in the run-up to Christmas. The sixth is David Dimbleby, whose new "landmark" arts series, **The Seven Ages of Britain**, is already being noisily promoted for early 2010.

Have you got it yet? The answer is that, despite fronting major non-fictional series, five of these names were not included in the secret list ranking 54 BBC presenters in order of popularity and importance. Dame Delia Smith was included – and so therefore is the odd one out – although she was listed only in the lowest of four categories: "Occasional Sparkle (But Limited Appeal)".

This sad group of has-been TV figures whom the house-bound might just watch on a rainy night if there were nothing on the other side also included Michael Palin and Lord Robert Winston, who had previously been led to believe that they ranked high in executives' estimation.

For a bonus point, who – in that list that didn't include Attenborough or Dimbleby – took the number one spot as the nation's best-loved factual presenter? Almost every television presenter, readers of the *Daily Mail* and whichever angry mole in the BBC Knowledge department leaked it to the newspaper will immediately get the answer. But, like all astonishing pieces of information, it bears repetition. The biggest beast of the educational, informative and entertaining series is Alan Yentob, presenter of *Imagine* and, though this was presumably irrelevant to his topping a list of the BBC's creative figures, creative director of the BBC.

And so the corporation ended the year as it had spent most of the previous three: desperately trying to stem torrents of bad publicity about the BBC being arrogantly badly managed and out of touch with public taste, and trying to calm down furious and morale-drained staff.

There's a debate over whether the worst calls were to those who weren't on the list or to those who were. Exquisitely, almost everyone on the chart except Botney had a reason to feel aggrieved. Even those alongside him in the first rank – Stephen Fry, Nigella Lawson, Richard Wilson, Andrew Marr – will have been shocked to be placed below the part-time presenter of BBC1's lowest-rating 10.30pm show.

Nor will Lord Barg be thrilled to find himself in the second level – "Mid-Rank (But Average Appeal" – given that *The South Bank Show* has arguably done rather better over the years in the appeal averages than *Imagine*. But, given that Barg hasn't presented a BBC show in 30 years – and isn't due to do so again until 2011 – what was he doing in the list anyway? Another nonsensical element was that Lauren Laverne was in the list, despite just having been sacked as presenter of *The Culture Show*, while Miranda Sawyer, who is taking over, was absent.

These anomalies raise doubts about what the document actually was, but that fact has become irrelevant now because of the effects caused by its perceptions. The capacity of the list to offend every presenter who works for the BBC – and even some who don't – is typical of the corporation's ability to damage itself. And, just as typically, efforts at damage-limitation made the mess worse.

One initial bit of spin given to journalists was that Yentob was only placed first because the list was compiled "alphabetically by Christian name". Apart from being insensitive to Yentob's Jewish roots, this exoneration was also obviously bollocks because Andrew Marr, qualifying second in the top tier alphabetically, was much lower down. The next excuse distributed was that the chart was assessing the appeal of presenters to younger audiences, hence the low showing for Delia and Palin.

But why would a down-with-the-kidz list be topped by Botney?

Just as embarrassingly for an organisation publicly committed to diversity and equal opportunities, only two of the 54 performers are non-white, and they (Levi Roots, Mishal Husain) are stuck in the third category.

So, next time you see a trail over the holidays for Dimble's major new series about Britain, just remember the 53 people the BBC would rather have had doing it and, above all, the number one choice. And Imagine... a BBC that, in 2010, will stop getting into these self-inflicted disasters.

'Remote Controller'

Gold, Frankincense and Mirth

"He can't cope with reality"

MEDIA NEWS

THE Siemens disaster continues to cause havoc at the BBC, thanks to the £2bn deal over ten years to take the Beeb's communications technology "into the 21st century".

The latest victims are the users of "broadcast critical" editing machines who found themselves unable to log on, thanks to a piece of software added by Siemens that refused to allow BBC machines to connect to the "outsourced" Siemens network.

Producers at Millbank, the BBC's Westminster office, phoned Siemens engineers in a desperate bid to reconnect themselves and put programmes on air. All of them, naturally, were enjoying a Christmas lunch, so lengthy waits ensued.

It now emerges that Siemens "Digital Media Initiative" is a year behind schedule, and patience has finally run out. After an extra £40m was handed over to Siemens to sort out its endless problems, with no sign of progress, the company has been dropped amid a flurry of face-saving press announcements.

The BBC says it needed "to change the specifications of the project": in other words, to replace it with one that worked. Siemens, it said, had been dropped "by mutual agreement"; in other words, it had agreed to be sacked.

The one thing licence-payers will never find out is how much the disaster has cost. "The project has been brought in-house, and while transparency is important to us, the terms of this arrangement are confidential," said a BBC mouthpiece. But it may be hard for the BBC to hide the true cost of the disaster when it finally retakes control of its own computer and phone systems and has to account for the vast cost of sorting the mess out.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

INNUMERATE DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC1

Anne Robinson: What is 12 times 6?
Contestant: Pass.

AR: What is 106 minus 75?
Law student: Pass.

AR: What is 15 plus 17?
Maths student: 33.

AR: What is the only prime number between 75 and 80?
Contestant: 99.

AR: The war between Israel and Egypt, which began on 5 June 1967 and ended on 10 June 1967, was better known by which name, based on its duration?
Eventual winner: The ten-year war.

NO festive forgiveness from Charlie Sale, sports diarist on the *Daily Mail*. "Only BBC Sport, having put on a decent Sports Personality programme, could manage to antagonise VIP guests at the after-show party in Sheffield by having a cordoned-off 'VVIP' section in the same room, guarded by two security heavies," he fumes.

"Those denied access to the ridiculous inner sanctum included England World Cup bid chief of staff Simon Greenberg and European golf tour chief executive George O'Grady…"

And someone else, perhaps? What he grandly dubs the VVIP area was merely a hack-free zone where – as one famous sportsman tells the *Eye* – "we have a chance to meet other sports people, have a chat and get drunk without people like Charlie Sale standing around listening". Sale somehow blagged his way past the ropes but was then asked to leave by Paul Davies, a BBC producer. "I'm *not* fucking going," roared the *Mail* hack, squaring up to the diminutive Davies. "You can't throw me out." He was frogmarched away by the two security heavies, still yelling "Don't you know who I am?"

A night's sleep did nothing to relieve the humiliation. On the train back to London the next day Sale sought out Davies and continued where he'd left off. "Who do you think you are? I'm telling you, I'm not the sort of man you cross." Clearly not.

MORE blood-letting at GMTV, following ITV's takeover of the fried-up breakfast station. According to the *Guardian*, the departure of long-serving programme editor Martin Frizell (aka Mr Fiona Phillips) "is understood to have surprised and shocked GMTV staff" – but not half as much as it surprised Frizell himself.

He was on his way to a nativity play on Thursday 10 December when he heard of an email circulating at GMTV which announced the appointment of a new programme editor – Sue Walton, head of ITV Daytime, previously in charge of the feeble *Loose Women*. It included a tribute to Walton from John Whiston, head of ITV Production: "As GMTV will find out, she does what she does through a mixture of quiet determination and charm – a fearsome combination!"

Frizell scampered back to the South Bank to ask the ITV suits what the hell was going on. Later that evening, once his pay-off had been sorted out, staff received a gushing valedictory email in which he claimed that: "I've had a blast but it feels like this is a natural time to move on. We have achieved all that we set *out to do*." Such was Frizzell's popularity, any leaving do is likely to be held in a phone box outside the studios.

Frizell's successor, the fearsome Walton, is now preparing to fold what GMTV calls "meaningful current affairs" into an expanded version of ITV's *This Morning*, with the "News Hour" from 6 to 7am produced by ITN. This will leave very little for anyone at GMTV to do – which is why staff expect a mass-cull in the new year. After all, as Frizell boasts, they have achieved all that they set out to do, so it's high time to "move on" – to the dole perhaps.

GOING LIVE

"MARTIN Brunt is outside the court in Lisbon," announced Sky News on the morning of 11 December, as the crime correspondent stood ready to deliver the latest news about Madeleine McCann's family's legal action against former police chief Goncalo Amaral.

"The hearing doesn't start for another 40 minutes or so, so we haven't even seen anyone arrive yet," he revealed.

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE OLD custom of there being no room at the inn in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve gets a politically correct makeover this week when, short of an 11th-hour reprieve, the choir of Clare College, Cambridge will effectively be banned from a long-standing engagement to sing at the shrine of the nativity on 24 December.

The intended visit was part of a seasonal tour to Palestine and Israel, planned a year ago, in which the choir and its director Tim Brown were to give performances of Bach's Christmas Oratorio with the Israel Camerata and, in addition, sing various services – including Bethlehem on Christmas Eve and St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem, on Christmas Day. All pretty unexceptionable, you'd think.

But then a British-based organisation called the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign had other ideas. The PSC is a lobbying group that adopts sometimes aggressive measures to stop musicians travelling to Israel; and it decided to target Clare's visit with a vengeance. Petitions were organised, big names in the music world were leant on, and considerable pressure was applied to Cambridge University in general and Clare in particular.

In response, the choir replied that although it was sympathetic to the broad aims of the PSC, it saw no reason to cancel the trip, which was specifically designed to take in Palestine as well as Israel. And there was no conceivable political agenda.

But that didn't satisfy the PSC, which then put pressure on St George's Cathedral to withdraw cooperation and did the same to the Palestinian authorities – who accordingly notified Clare that the choir would not be allowed on to Palestinian soil to sing in Bethlehem.

The outcome is that Israel now gets the Christmas Oratorio but Palestine loses out. As do the Clare choir members, who have been deprived not just of the once-in-a-lifetime experience of singing at Bethlehem on Christmas Eve but also of the chance to know for themselves what it means to go through the infamous border wall.

The choir's one consolation is that many of those leading music-figures, angered by the efforts of the PSC, have contacted Brown to offer support and do some lobbying of their own. As a result it might now be that, come the 24th, choir members are allowed through the wall but not as a choir, only as individuals, and on the strict condition that they *don't sing* – which defeats the object of the exercise. Whether they get to Bethlehem or not, you can't help feeling the three kings had an easier time of it.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

OH YEAH?

"In movies, we are providing the most compelling and advanced filmed entertainment in the industry. Blockbusters like *Ice Age 3* and *Avatar* may well change forever the way movies are made." – *Christmas email from* ***Rupert Murdoch*** *to News Corp staff.*

RADIO 1's *Newsbeat* has a "reporter" and security team expensively embedded in Helmand with the US Marine Corps. "Afghan conflict up close as R1 camps with the Marines," announced a puff-piece in the BBC's in-house propaganda rag *Ariel*.

The team has learned that "there are few signs that life for ordinary Afghans is improving. The people are poor, girls are not educated and farmers still prefer to grow heroin"; facts that any quick Google search could easily establish.

In return for this insight, the Marines themselves have to run the added risks involved with babysitting hacks: in this case mounting "milk run" patrols away from any additional danger and laying on extra supplies and guard duty.

In R1's case, this generosity had to extend to setting up a separate tent for their female reporter, away from the others "in case she distracts the troops". The fact that the BBC's "diversity" gurus demanded such separate accommodation ought to have been distraction enough.

LUVVIES

Downey Jr said he felt Conan Doyle would approve of the new film, which has a number of Ritchie's trademark violent scenes familiar to those who have seen his previous releases, including *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*.

The actor said, "There is an esoteric element to this as well. Sometimes you just feel you are in the right groove, you feel the history and the legacy of something. Sometimes you just feel like you're being silently approved of from some other place and time."

Telegraph website

Submitted by Catriona Oldershaw.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

"GIVING to charity via friends is actually a form of advertising your own good nature," declared Virginia Ironside in the *Daily Mail* last week, invoking "a curse on these smug types who buy you a goat in Africa for Christmas".

"For heaven's sake," she huffed, "it's not as if the rest of us don't give money to charity! (Hope and Homes for Children, since you ask.) But we do it privately, not wishing to trumpet our generosity to the world."

It was, then, presumably another Virginia Ironside who appeared on BBC2's *Celebrity Cash in the Attic* in May, "delving through her belongings to uncover her hidden treasures" and then auctioning them off on behalf of Hope and Homes for Children – in front of around a million viewers.

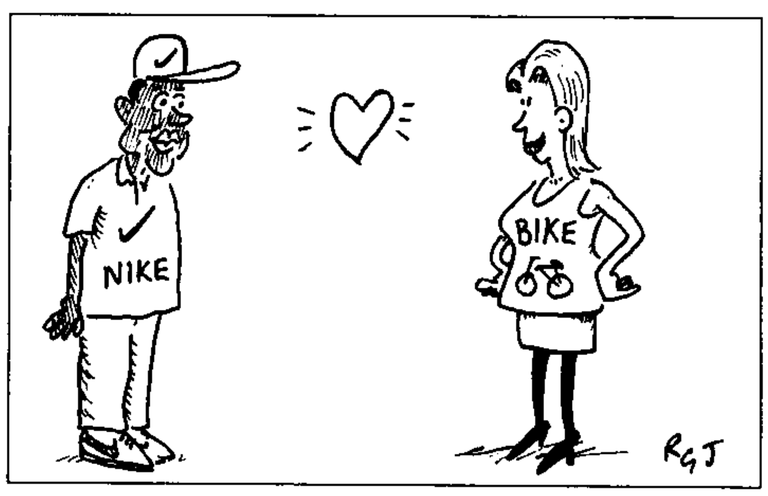
AD NAUSEAM

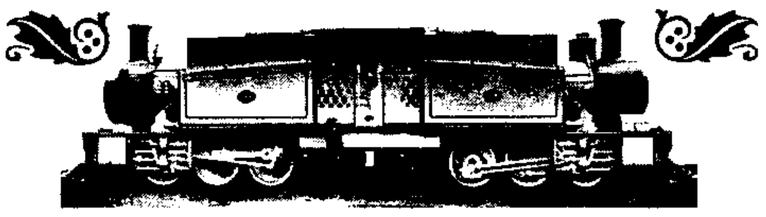
"Tiger and his family have our support as they work through this private matter. Our partnership continues." – *Gatorade statement, 3 December.*

"We decided several months ago to discontinue Gatorade Tiger Focus along with some other products to make room for our planned series of innovative products in 2010." – *Gatorade statement, 9 December*

MERRY Christmas to agency Fallon from Sony, the client for whom it developed the bouncing balls, streaming paint and hopping rabbits that made Sony Bravia's "Colour Like No Other" one of the few stand-out campaigns of the last few years.

In gratitude for Fallon's work, which has garnered more awards than any other continuing campaign since 2002, Sony announced last week that it was ditching Fallon from the £50m account. New agency Anomaly must have something pretty special up its sleeve. Or be cheaper.





SIGNAL FAILURES

A freight-ful record

AS Gordon Brown pontificated before the Copenhagen climate-change conference, Whitehall found an easy way to avoid missing its green targets: by denying they were ever set.

After transport secretary Lord Adonis was asked at the transport select committee earlier this month about targets for switching freight from lorries to trains (which emit 70 percent less CO_2 per tonne-mile), a Department for Transport spokesman said: "We have set no targets for rail's share of the freight market."

Er, some mistake, surely? Back in July 2000, the government's 10-year transport plan said of rail freight (under the heading "targets and indicators"): "We believe it ought to be possible to increase market share to 10 percent by 2010 from 7 percent now – an 80 percent increase in rail freight – provided the rail-freight companies can deliver improvements in performance and efficiency."

Rail-freight firms bought new rolling stock and almost eradicated inefficient ex-BR locos. But, as regular *Eye* readers will recall, Labour wobbled just two months after publishing its plan. When truckers protested about fuel prices, Brown duly froze the truckers' fuel duty for years while massively increasing duty on diesel used for trains (see *Eye* 1155). In 2001 heavier lorries were allowed on the roads after Labour accepted flawed arguments about greener road freight (*Eye* 1206). In 2003, a decades-old grant scheme for switching cargo from road to rail was frozen (*Eye* 1073). And in 2004 state-owned Royal Mail scrapped its rail contract.

Meanwhile schemes to increase clearance under rail bridges have been delayed, so 75 percent of containers arriving at UK ports are too high for most trains and must travel by road. And the south east still has no big rail-freight terminal, after Labour blocked plans for one near Heathrow (*Eye* 1066).

Official statistics show rail had just 8 percent of the freight market in 2008. And from 2000 to 2008 rail tonne-miles rose just 14 percent – some little way short of 80 percent. No wonder the government now pretends its target was never a target.

BRITAIN's passenger-train firms are so numerous and driven by self-interest they cannot agree on collective promotions which might help boost their revenues in straitened times.

The revenue growth of many is less than forecast (witness the death of National Express East Coast and the hammering of First Great Western but for its huge bailouts). And whereas in the last recession British Rail's discount promotion with Boots won new passengers, today's railway simply can't organise such nationwide offers.

Overseas, nationwide train firms have corporate schemes where companies bulk buy tickets for employees to make business trips by rail. Deutsche Bahn, for example, offers discounts of up to 5.5 percent, better terms for returning unused tickets and "expert advice" from corporate-client agents. These might be helpful in Britain, where fares are more complicated and expensive. The Association of Train Operating Companies even told a travel-trade forum there was "a desire for corporate deals". Alas, making them work wasn't easy "because of the number of operators".

A nationwide corporate scheme is impossible here because train firms wouldn't agree on discounts or how to share out the revenue. Virgin Trains reckons there should be no discount which might distort its "revenue management policy". Stephanie Rivet, Virgin Trains' revenue-management director, told the forum: "We spend a lot of time talking to corporate clients to get the best deal for them." Really? In fact Virgin simply advises them of the cheaper fares available for those who travel when no one else wants to – hardly the same thing as a discount.

PS: Perhaps Virgin Trains managers should look at a British airline which does offer "tailored corporate deals" and has a loyalty scheme for firms and their employees. Its called… Virgin Atlantic.

'Dr B Ching'

MEDICINE BALLS

NHS Choices feedback

THE NHS ends the year with a health secretary out of his depth, two headless regulators and the threat of crippling financial cuts. But at least patients can now leave feedback about their experiences in NHS and private hospitals to enable others to make better choices about where they're treated.

Eye reader Alison Wilson recently posted feedback on the NHS Choices website about the care she received at North Staffordshire Nuffield at Newcastle-under-Lyme. Her message was:

Liked...

The staff in outpatients were kind and understanding, as were one or two of the staff on the ward.
The catering staff were very cheerful, kind and helpful.
My surgeon was excellent.

Disliked...

Attitude of most of the staff was offhand.
Drug safety (prescribed a drug to which I am allergic, drugs missed, staff not knowing how the morphine syringe worked).
Poor cleanliness of facilities – and of me (as a patient who was unable to do much for myself).
General neglect, including neglect of some essential instructions from my consultant.
Found crying in bed by a visitor, where I had been for more than an hour, no-one on the staff had noticed as no-one had been in my room for hours despite me fainting the day before.
Staff failed on a number of basic tasks, leading me to unnecessary discomfort and suffering which I could have done without.
I needed some advice on aftercare at home (I had had abdominal surgery) but was given none at all despite asking two members of staff for it.
When I rang up as I was bleeding at home, I got the brush off twice on the phone before being called back to the hospital.
Left hospital after five days in great distress with bedsores, a dressing which had to be removed and changed at home because it had been put on incorrectly, sore hands due to errors with a cannula, and a wound infection (wound still needed treatment a year later).

Anything else...

Under pressure from my insurer, I did make a formal complaint about my care a year ago. Since that time I have received (late) one sarcastic letter from the hospital, which I found very distressing, but despite me writing to them to say so, they have never replied.

The response from NHS Choices was decisive. "Thank you for your contribution to the website. We have removed your contribution because it is a serious complaint about a specific hospital, service and/or clinician which should first be addressed by the relevant hospital. We suggest in the first instance you contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

"They offer: confidential advice and support to families and their carers, information on the NHS and health-related matters, confidential assistance in resolving problems and concerns quickly, explanations of complaints procedures and how to get in touch with someone who can help, and information on how you can get more involved in your own healthcare. To find your PALS office, search for your hospital on www.nhs.uk and go to the Facilities and Patient Support tab. If you want to make a complaint, please see: http://www.nhs.uk/aboutNHSChoices/Pages/Howtocomplaincompliment.aspx"

So, not only is NHS Choices censoring critical comments from patients but it is not bothering to read submissions either. Ms Wilson had already made a formal complaint and isn't entitled to the NHS support it suggests. Also, patients are not supposed to post comments on the website about care received if it was more than 18 months ago. But if critical comments are censored and redirected through the complaints procedure, possibly ending up with the ombudsman or legal action, this generally takes *longer* than 18 months. A neat way to ensure all the "independent patient feedback" is overwhelmingly positive.

M.D.

TheAgri Brigade

DESPITE fierce opposition the government is pressing ahead with a draft animal health bill it claims is designed to give the farming industry a greater say in animal health policy.

However, the legislation will also put in place an "independent body" with the power to raise tens of millions of pounds in levies from livestock farmers who suspect the so-called "Responsibility and Cost Sharing" bill is less about "responsibility" and much more about "cost sharing".

The push for the bill is said to come not from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), which is developing the policy, but from the Treasury which is still haunted by the cost of the 2001 foot and mouth epidemic.

Keen as the Treasury might be to see the animal health bill on the statute books, it faces a rough ride as influential bodies – and not just farmers – line up to criticise its early outline. These include the National Audit Office, which only recently concluded that Defra was not capable of delivering a "fair and equitable" cost-sharing scheme and does not have a full grasp of the effects of livestock disease epidemics; the Scottish Assembly, which in a bizarre twist of devolution has found itself responsible for animal health policy north of the border but still dependent on Westminster for the "budget" to implement it; and the British Veterinary Association whose council is reported to be in a state of "consternation" since it learnt that Defra's proposals will ignore many of its recommendations.

At the same time Defra has incensed farmers by implying that it is only through the imposition of a "cost-sharing levy" that farmers bear the financial burden of maintaining animal health and controlling the spread of disease. This ignores the investment livestock producers have made in recent years in improved bio-security and in upgrading their record keeping of animal births, deaths and on/off farm movements.

It also overlooks the thousands of dairy farmers who, every day, shoulder much of the cost of fighting the spread of bovine tuberculosis across the south west and west of England. More than 2,500 farmers are currently observing quarantine restrictions which mean no cattle movement on or off their holdings – sometimes for years on end. These same farmers are also committed to an expensive and laborious "testing" regime of their cows which have to be gathered from the fields, held in cattle yards and then put through handling facilities every 60 days to make sure no more of them have become infected.

Only when the draft bill is published next month will farmers find out if it gives them any real influence over policy or whether it is just a device to force them to pay for Defra's often highly inefficient disease control management. A "management", incidentally, which in the case of Defra secretary Hilary Benn and his refusal to instigate a badger cull like the one currently underway in the Republic of Ireland, is actually more concerned with pandering to public opinion than the health of farm animals.

'New Bio-waste Spreader'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

SOMEONE HAS TOUPEE

AMERICAN tycoon Donald Trump, who plans to despoil a beautiful stretch of dunes north of Aberdeen with a vulgar £1bn golf hotel and housing development (*Eyes passim*), has not endeared himself to civilised Scots with his hysterical attacks on anyone who opposes him.

Last month he called Michael Forbes, a salmon fisherman who refuses to sell his home and land, a "village idiot" and "loser". A harsh judgement on a man who faces eviction along with other residents if Aberdeenshire council imposes compulsory purchase orders so Trump can build on their land. Recently the toupeed one's sidekick George Sorial called four Aberdeenshire councillors who had the effrontery to oppose the hideous scheme "scoundrels" who "have to be stopped" (*Eye* 1243).

It is curious that Trump and his entourage are so intolerant of opposition, given that the bouffant-haired buffoon has the Scottish government, most of the local council and the local press on his side. Last week the Aberdeen *Press and Journal* said it would not be reporting the views of protest group Tripping Up Trump any longer after "revealing" that some of its thousands of members live outside the immediate area or have been involved in other environmental protest groups.

The *P&J*'s mean-spirited suspicion of "outsiders" is all the more curious given that editor Derek Tucker (affectionately known by his hacks as "Mother Tucker") himself hails originally from that famously tartan-trewed burgh... Liverpool.

FRIENDS REUNITED

BACK in 2007 *Eye* 1184 raised an eyebrow at the appointment of PR woman Lorraine Langham as director of corporate services at Ofsted, not long after her chum Christine Gilbert became Her Majesty's chief inspector of education, children's services and skills.

They had previously worked together at that well-known centre of excellence, the London borough of Tower Hamlets: Gilbert as chief executive and Langham as communications director. Ms Gilbert clearly likes to have familiar faces around her. Earlier this year John Goldup joined as development director, social care, and Richard Brooks came aboard as director of strategy.

Goldup was formerly head of adult services at Tower Hamlets and Brooks was a Labour councillor there. Their appointments bring the number of ex-Tower Hamlets people on Ofsted's nine-strong executive board to three. The other highlight on Goldup's CV prior to getting one of the most senior child protection posts in Britain was as deputy head of the London borough of Islington's children's services in the 1980s and early 1990s, when a vicious paedophile ring was operating in the borough's children's homes. An independent inquiry condemned Goldup's department as in a "deplorable state". Just fancy that.

● IN OCTOBER, to show how they empathise with the recession-hit person in the street, Peterborough city councillors voted to ask the council's 18 highest-paid officers – all on more than £55,000 per year – to sign up for a voluntary pay freeze which would save the council a modest but useful £33,000 a year.

At the start of December councillors had another chance to show how much they empathise with the recession-hit proles by voting to freeze their own pay. The motion was defeated. Instead the councillors' wage bill will rise by 12.5 percent over the next two years, from £627,814 in 2008-9 to £705,127 in 2010-11. Trebles all round!

BUCKS FIZZLE

THE chief executive of Southwest One, the IBM subsidiary running local services to a million people in the West Country, has fallen on his sword after a disastrous year.

Richard Jones gave staff nine days' notice that he was taking early retirement. The announcement came 10 days after the company published its first set of accounts, four months late. Southwest One, which has a £500m contract to provide services to two councils and Avon & Somerset Police, made a pre-tax loss of £2.5m and has been plagued by problems with its SAP [*sic*] computer system.

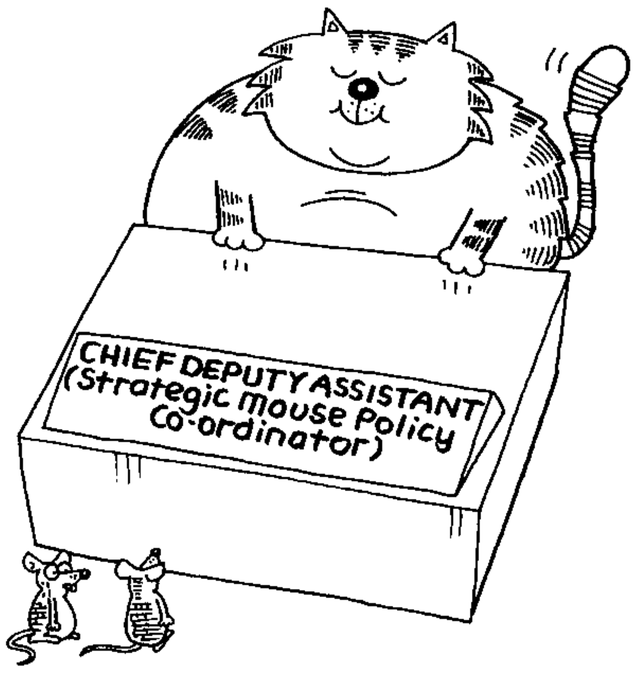
Meanwhile all is not well for Susan Barnes, former Southwest One director and former wife of fellow director and Avon and Somerset chief constable Colin Port. Ms Barnes, who helped set up Southwest One, prompting allegations in parliament of a conflict of interest, has abruptly quit her new job at Buckinghamshire county council, where she was director of its Pathfinder outsourcing project – a similar set-up to Southwest One. But now she is gone, with no formal announcement by the council. Tendering is not due to be completed until next November.

Ms Barnes' departure came just three weeks after two of the four companies negotiating with Bucks pulled out. They were BT and Crapita, which lost out to IBM in Somerset. Those still in the race are Mouchel and, er, IBM.

WHO'S SORRY NOW

EARLIER this month Westminster council leader Colin Barrow, clearly trying to get himself into the *Eye*'s "Scenes You Seldom See" cartoon, gobsmacked readers of the *Evening Standard* by declaring that he wanted to "bury the ghost of [Shirley] Porter once and for all".

The former leader wasted £37m of public money operating a "homes for votes" policy, which involved moving council tenants seen as potential Labour voters in marginal wards into asbestos-



"So what makes you think he's a public sector fat cat?"

ridden flats in solid Labour wards, so their homes could be flogged cheap to potential Tory voters. "What she did was wrong, illegal, and we are unreservedly sorry," said Barrow. "I personally want to make it absolutely clear I believe Shirley Porter and her policies did significant damage and it is a legacy I want to bury once and for all."

Barrow's predecessor as leader Sir Simon Milton, now one of London mayor Boris Johnson's deputies, could never quite bring himself to condemn his old chum Shirley in such a way. Some of Barrow's fellow Tory councillors still can't. After listening to a recent Radio 4 play about Porter, Marylebone councillor Harvey Marshall declared: "It failed to reflect the work she did in Westminster. I knew her well and I had a great deal of respect for her. Shirley Porter actually did a lot of good for the council – she took us into the real world and made us the number one council in the country." Indeed.

PS: There was an interesting council by-election result in Westminster on 10 December. Labour, as expected, comfortably held on to its safe Queens Park ward seat. What no one expected was the margin of victory – 62.6 per cent for Labour against 16.2 for the Tories – a swing of 11 percent from Conservative to Labour. Just fancy that!

● A VERY Merry Christmas to "Independent" Rochdale councillor David Murphy, who left with his wife for a new life in Spain at the end of 2007, yet still holds on to his seat and pockets £7,644 a year courtesy of the council taxpayer.

Cllr Murphy, originally a Labour councillor, continued to draw his allowance after emigrating two years ago, returning to attend a council meeting once every six months to avoid disqualification, as the law allows. The Labour party kicked Murphy out when it realised what he was up to, but since then he has carried as an independent. In 2009, he has reappeared for just two meetings of the full council, on 4 February and 22 July – enabling him to trouser a splendid £3,822 per meeting.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

VISITING Nottingham last month Gordon Brown, berated the Tory-controlled county council for announcing £30m worth of cuts. The measures include shedding 470 jobs, closing day centres and selling off 13 residential care homes.

The PM said: "To cut £30m of your budget at a time when we are wanting to get the economy moving forward is a big mistake". The cuts, he said, were "ideological".

Meanwhile Greenwich council is also proposing £30m of cuts. Compulsory redundancies, pay cuts, privatisations, cutting funding to voluntary sector organisations and social care services are all on the agenda.

When the council workers' union Unison asked the PM whether he also condemned the cuts in Greenwich, answer came there none. But then Greenwich is a Labour council.

**** DON'T MISS the annual Rotten Boroughs Awards next issue, the most eagerly awaited event in the local government calendar!***

HUSBAND

GRAND PRIVATE EYE CHRISTMAS QUIZ

JUNK Jenga! Chuck out Charades! *Private Eye*'s festive, fun-for-all-the-family quiz is the only party game you'll need this Christmas.

You'll find all the answers in stories exclusively reported in *Private Eye* during 2009 – or on page 15.

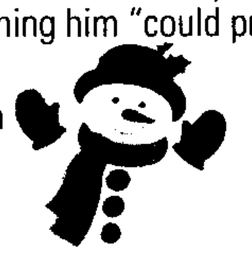
● WHO?

1. Which celebrant, described as "shit-faced", "rat-arsed" and "boiled-as-an-owl", took the Drunkest Wedding Guest Award at Rebekah Wade's nuptials in June?

a) "Thirsty" Will Lewis
b) Rupert Murdoch
c) David Cameron

2. In November, home secretary Alan Johnson ordered the deportation of an African asylum seeker, despite medical evidence the man had been tortured and a plea from his constituency MP two years earlier that returning him "could prove fatal". Who was that MP?

a) Gordon Brown
b) Alan Johnson
c) Jacqui Smith



3. Which multi-millionaire bought a 15,000-acre Scottish shooting estate this summer and requested its location be kept secret because he was a "controversial figure" with concerns about security?

a) Tony Blair
b) Colonel Gadaffi
c) Paul Dacre

● WHERE?

4. Where did Britain's four senior spending watchdogs, the chair and chief executive of the Audit Commission, the Auditor General and chair of the National Audit Office meet to discuss, er, waste?

a) At the NAO office, five minutes from the Audit Commission office
b) At the Audit Commission, five minutes from the NAO office
c) At the Italian restaurant Quirinale for a £240 dinner paid for by taxpayers?

5. Doctors and nurses from which countries are exempt from taking an English language test to practise in the UK?

a) Australia, New Zealand
b) South Africa, USA
c) Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia or any other EU country

6. Who was revealed to be domiciled in France for tax purposes?

a) Lord Rothermere, true-Brit proprietor of the *Daily Mail*
b) Zac Goldsmith, true-Brit Tory candidate
c) Legendary French chanteur Johnny Hallyday

● WHAT?

7. Asked about the death of Michael Jackson, Lord Mandelson replied…

a) "I'm not absolutely sure who Michael Jackson is. Is he the… he's called Jacko, isn't he?"
b) "No, I don't have anything to say about him."
c) "I once nearly met him in Berlin."

● HOW MUCH?

8. FirstGroup made £51m in UK rail profits in the first six months of 2009-10. How much of that came from taxpayer bailouts?

a) £1m
b) £10m
c) All of it – and more.

9. Publicly-owned poverty relief fund CDC reported a £330m loss. How much did the executives who bought its fund management arm Actis for £373,000 in 2004 take home after the privatization?

a) £20m, around £1m each
b) £2m, around £100,000 each
c) Nothing. They decided it wouldn't be appropriate.

10. A full-time customer service operator for Royal Bank of Scotland earns around £13,500 a year. How often does former boss Sir Fred Goodwin receive a similar amount in pension?

a) Once a month
b) Once a week
c) Never – given that the bank is now publicly-owned, it would be outrageous.

● HIGHER OR LOWER?

11. $2.1bn = Loss made by Goldman Sachs in three months up to January.

? = Bonuses paid to Goldman Sachs staff in January.

12. 500 = Swine flu jabs provided to GP practices with 500 patients.

? = Swine flu jabs provided to GP practices with 20,000 patients.

13. 3hrs 20mins = Time it took Tony Blair to make public statement on death of Princess Diana.

? = Time it took Gordon "we're moving from this period when celebrity matters" Brown to make public statement on death of Jade Goody.

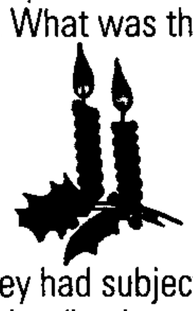
14. 7 years = Time it took to get an inquiry when *Private Eye* broke the Bristol heart scandal in 1992.

? = Time it took for an inquiry to be announced when *Private Eye* broke the Bristol pathology scandal in 2009.

● A QUESTION OF LAW

15. Lawyer and government adviser Michael Napier spent £350,000 taking the *Eye* to court in a (failed) attempt to stop us revealing he had been formally reprimanded by the Law Society, on grounds that were described as "singularly unattractive" and "absurd" by appeal judges. What was the basis of his complaint?

a) The story was wrong
b) It was libellous
c) It was confidential.



16. Met Police accepted they had subjected London terror suspect Babar Ahmad to "serious gratuitous prolonged unjustified violence" when they arrested him in 2003. Before they changed their plea, the judge announced that he found the disappearance of crucial evidence "startling". What was missing?

a) The arresting officers' incident report books
b) Six cassettes of police interviews
c) "Several large mailsacks" of evidence about other complaints against the arresting officers.

17. *Daily Express* proprietor Richard Desmond sued author Tom Bower last summer for claiming he abused his position by instructing his editors to attack his business enemies. Which of the following evidence did Judge Eady rule was relevant to the case and could go before the jury?

a) The full text of a memo from a former editor complaining that he was forced to run "unjustified stories to settle scores"
b) A tape of Desmond telling a businessman "I'm the worst fucking enemy you'll ever have" three days before a negative story was printed about him
c) The fact Desmond once punched his night editor for not running a story he wanted in his paper.

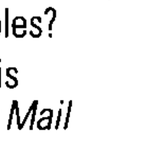
● WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

18. Eco Gnomics warned that *The End of the Line*, a film about over-fishing, would put seafood companies and their trade body on the spot over unsustainable practices. How did British consumer-funded quango the Seafish Industry Authority react?

a) Sent someone to Utah to spy on the film's premiere at the Sundance festival.
b) Gave £120,000 to a new PR agency to promote the UK seafood industry
c) Lobbied Brussels for a European ban on the trade in bluefin tuna, in line with British government policy.

19. In the year the government clamped down on tax havens and bonuses, what fate befell Treasury director and Audit Commission chairman Michael O'Higgins after the *Eye* exposed his use of a Jersey trust to avoid hundreds of thousands of pounds on his bonuses as a management consultant?

a) He was arrested
b) He was stripped of his jobs as a spending watchdog and running the country's finances
c) He was re-appointed Audit Commission chairman for another three years and stayed at the Treasury.



20. Peter Mandelson lined up Dutch firm TNT as a "partner" in the proposed Post Office privatisation. The plan stalled after *Private Eye* revealed…

a) That TNT planned massive job cuts
b) That TNT would not guarantee deliveries to remote areas
c) That TNT was subject to a tax investigation in Britain after admitting "a number of illegal acts".

● WHAT DO THEY HAVE IN COMMON?

21. *Daily Telegraph* cricket reporters Oliver Clive, Austin Peters, Charles Carrick, Matthew Hannah, William Gray, Perry Crooke and Dan Harbles?

a) They were all at school with Will Lewis
b) They were all recruited from the *Daily Mail*
c) They don't exist.

22. Chris Gent, board member with responsibility for bonuses at collapsed bank Lehman Brothers; James Sassoon, former banker with UBS who helped organise the British Rail privatisation and the launch of the private finance initiative?

a) They both left the UK in protest at the new 50 percent tax rate
b) They were both picked by David Cameron to sit on his "Economic Recovery Committee"
c) They both renounced their former careers and took Holy Orders.

● KIDDIES' CORNER

23. New vetting rules for those having "regular" contact with children – watered down after a public outcry – were first highlighted in the Eye in May by a member of which group, forecasting that they would put an end to their involvement in schools?

a) Music teachers
b) Swimming instructors
c) Children's laureates.

24. What radio series fell foul of BBC compliance rules in March, when its producer was told he hadn't

properly considered how its presentation of child abuse could offend to listeners?

a) A reading of *Oliver Twist*
b) The Moral Maze on the Baby P case
c) Gary Glitter's *Private Passions*

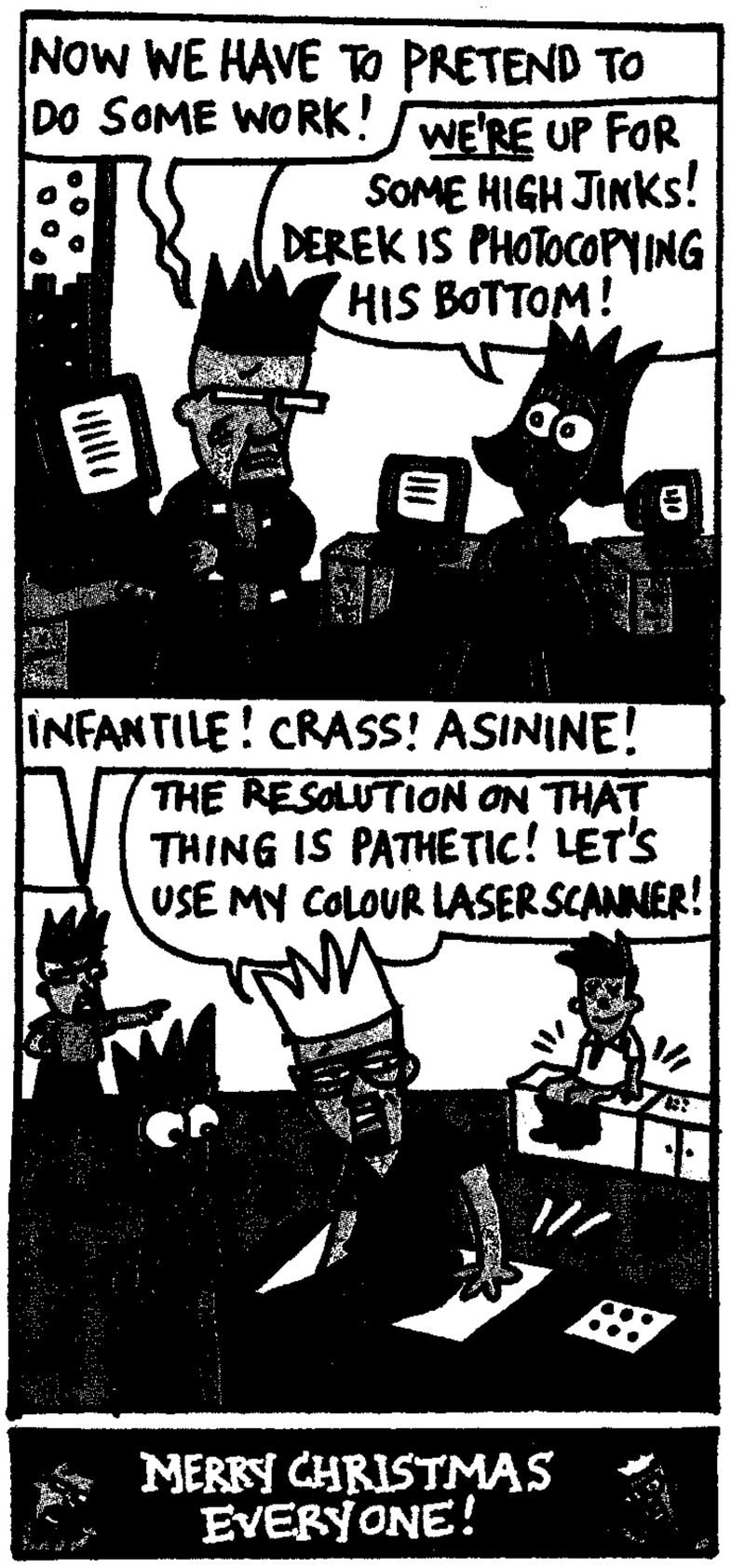
● AND FINALLY – THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION

25. Why was the so-called "Lockerbie bomber" Ali Mohmed al Megrahi freed from a Scottish jail?

a) Because Megrahi had prostate cancer and the Scottish authorities were suddenly overcome by "compassion" and agreed he should be released to die with his family in Libya.
b) Because the British government had done a deal with their new friend Colonel Gaddafi.
c) Because Megrahi was not the Lockerbie bomber, and details emerging at his appeal would have been too embarrassing for the prosecuting authorities and governments of the UK and US.

A GRIM CHRISTMAS PARTY

KNIFE & PACKER

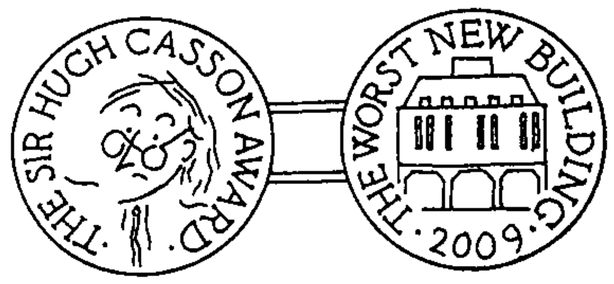

NOW WE HAVE TO PRETEND TO DO SOME WORK!
WE'RE UP FOR SOME HIGH JINKS! DEREK IS PHOTOCOPYING HIS BOTTOM!
INFANTILE! CRASS! ASININE!
THE RESOLUTION ON THAT THING IS PATHETIC! LET'S USE MY COLOUR LASER SCANNER!
MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE!

PRIVATE EYE CHRISTMAS QUIZ ANSWERS

Who? 1. (b); 2. (b); 3. (c). **Where?** 4. (c); 5. (c); 6. (a & b – Hallyday is a tax exile in Switzerland). **What?** 7. (a, b & c). **How much?** 8. (c); 9. (a); 10. (b). **Higher or lower?** 11. (higher - $2.6bn); 12. (the same – 500); 13. (higher – but only just, at 3hrs 35 mins); 14. (lower – just 7 days). **A Question of Law** 15. (c); 16. (a, b & c); 17. None of them. **What Happened Next?** 18. (a & b); 19. (c); 20. (c). **What do they have in common?** 21. (c); 22. (b). **Kiddies' corner** 23. (c); 24. (a). **And finally the million dollar question** 25. (Definitely not c. No way.)

NOOKS and CORNERS

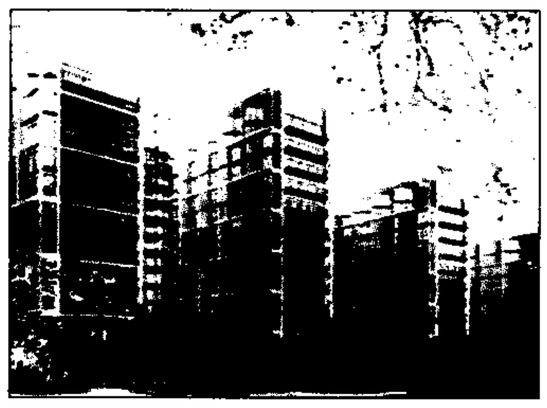
PERHAPS giving the prestigious Casson Medal to what was going to be called "One Hyde Park" and is now to be 100 Knightsbridge after the intervention of the Post Office is a little premature.



After all, residents will not move in to what is intended to be a block of the most luxurious and expensive flats in London until next year. But although some scaffolding is still up and cranes hover overhead, the topping out ceremony actually took place last March and enough is visible for us to see how it will look.

Four connected "pavilions", with gridded elevations enhanced by "red/brown patinated copper privacy screens", varying in height between 10 and 14 storeys, run along the north side of Knightsbridge at the top end of Sloane Street. They are big, dominating and – as they are costing £490m to build – "iconic".

The architects are Rogers Stirk Harbour & Partners, the firm ornamented with the name of Lord Rogers of Riverside. Poor Richard has had a trying year, so perhaps the prize will be welcome. He certainly needs cheering up.



He was downgraded in his role as adviser to the mayor of London, telling Ken Livingstone how to make the capital more like Barcelona, when Boris Johnson asked him merely to serve on two advisory panels. He has now resigned as he "felt the roles did not give him sufficient scope to use his expertise". Then his firm's destructive proposals for enlarging the British Museum were rejected by Camden council (*Eyes passim*) – although I'm sorry to say the museum is arrogantly persisting with a slightly modified scheme by the firm rather than employing a more sensitive architect.

Then, of course, there was his dismissal by the developers Qatari Diar from the immensely lucrative redevelopment of the former Chelsea Barracks site at a cost of £3bn (*Eyes* 1235 & 1251). Rogers blames this entirely on the allegedly unconstitutional action of the Prince of Wales in writing to the Emir of Qatar objecting to the design. But the truth is that there was strong local opposition to the style of architecture and the massive overdevelopment proposed, and Westminster council was unlikely to grant planning permission.

The Rogers firm apparently received £10m-£20m in fees (and is suing for some £1.5m more). But Rogers has been relentless in attacking the heir to the throne: "The idea that he is a man of the people fascinates me," he says. "He is a man of the rich people, that is for sure." That, as they say, is a bit rich coming from someone who has always been intensely relaxed about working with the filthy rich. Rogers was, after all, architect to the new Lloyd's building in the City, that supreme symbol of Thatcherite capitalism; and now his firm has designed this monstrous block for the super-rich (most buyers, so far, are Middle Eastern or Russian oligarchs and one penthouse flat has apparently been sold for a record-breaking £100m to a Qatari prince).

100 Knightsbridge enables us to imagine what the Chelsea barracks development might have looked like as the design approach is similar, although the Knightsbridge pavilions taper towards the street. The architects claim that the buildings will integrate well with their neighbours (which are of brick) and that the glazed circulation cores between the pavilions "maximise visual connections between the Park and Knightsbridge". This is nonsense.

Although there will be a road between the two pushed to the west end of the site, the development, with its tight security, forms a massive barrier, both visual and physical, between the street and Hyde Park – unlike its predecessor. 100 Knightsbridge replaced Bowater House, designed by Guy Morgan & Partners and built in 1956-58 by the developer Harold Samuel, who got away with excessive height by giving land for road widening and raising the centre of the building up on "pilotis" so the park could be seen from Knightsbridge. Bowater House has been dismissed as a dreary obtrusive modernist eyesore (unlike the Rogers creation, of course), but the late, great Ian Nairn thought it above average and "an exciting experience to walk under – and especially to drive under".

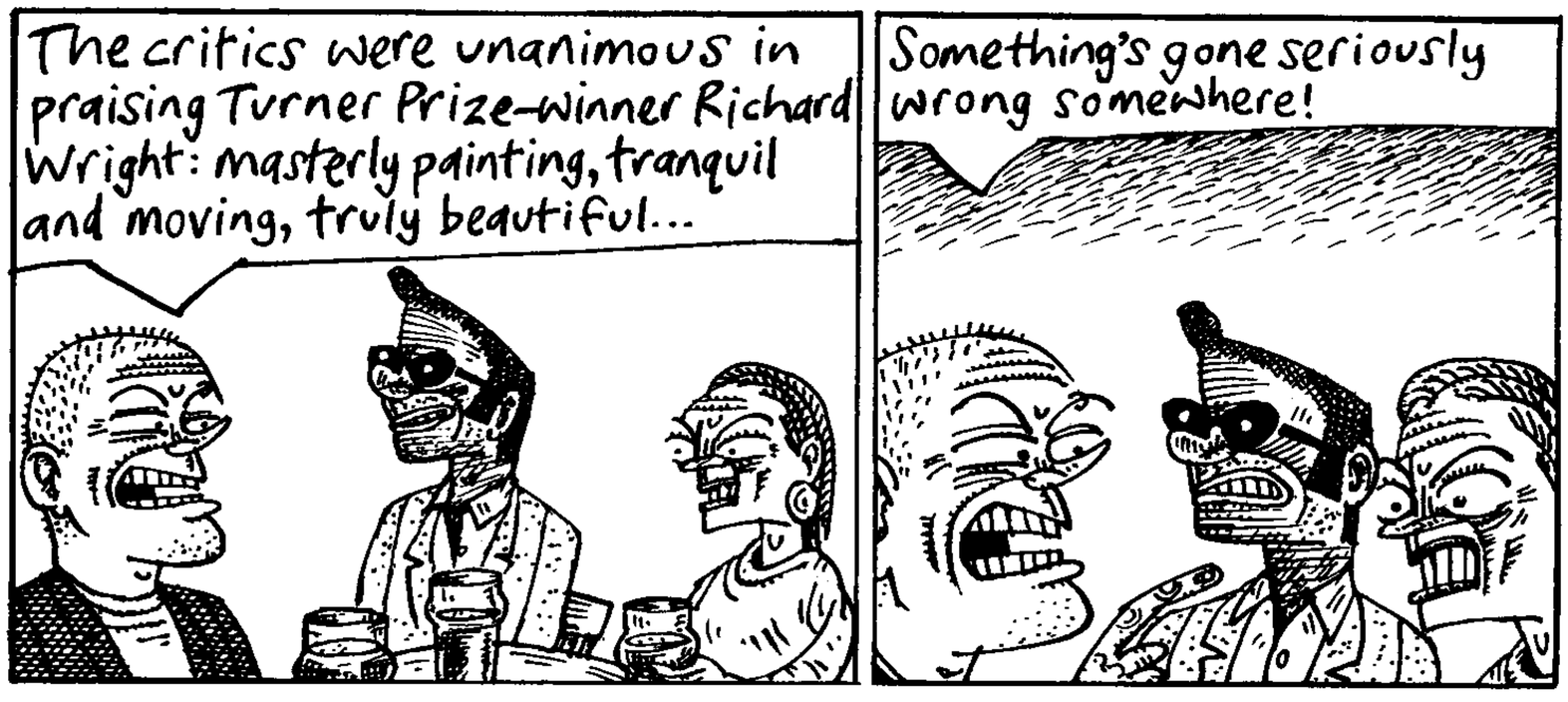
100 Knightsbridge is built by Project Grande (Guernsey) Ltd, a joint venture between the Prime Minister of Qatar, H.E. Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani and the CPC Group, offshore investors. The development managers are the Candy Brothers, who once worked so closely with the Qataris but are now suing them for £100m over the Chelsea Barracks debacle (which must make the Knightsbridge job interesting).

The development consists of 86 luxury apartments and three "exclusive boutiques". At the last count, 40 flats remain unsold, so perhaps this was a speculation too far. But the real question is not why we shall have to look at an overweening (half-empty) award-winning masterpiece by Rogers Stirk Harbour & Partners for the foreseeable future, but why the alien rulers of a small Middle Eastern autocracy are able to wield so much power and influence and develop large chunks of central London? The answer, of course, is that they are stinking rich because of our own pathetic dependency on their oil. Such is the absurdity of our modern condition.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


The critics were unanimous in praising Turner Prize-winner Richard Wright: masterly painting, tranquil and moving, truly beautiful...
Something's gone seriously wrong somewhere!

Letters

Lunch bill

Sir,

Private Eye suggested that I used the funds of Camden and Islington Foundation Trust (which I chair) to pay for lunch with the chief executive of the Audit Commission in February (In the Back, Eye 1250).

I did indeed take my old friend Steve Bundred out to lunch, but there are two big mistakes in the Private Eye account. Firstly I was not chair of the Trust at the time, and secondly I did not use public funds, but paid out of my own pocket. In fact, despite visiting 48 of the Trust's sites, I have yet to claim a penny in expenses.

Since becoming chair in March, I have come to realise that Camden and Islington provides first class services for people with mental illness, and alcohol and drugs problems. We are one of only three mental health Trusts London to get the highest possible rating from the Care Quality Commission. What has really impressed me is the dedication and professionalism of our staff. They help and encourage people who, in many cases, are stigmatised for their condition in the wider community. It is vital work, and I am very proud to be chair of such a Trust.

RICHARD ARTHUR,

London N6.

● Yes. Sorry for our misinterpretation of the Audit Commission's hospitality list. Ed.

Thribb busted

Sir,

If E.J. Thribb had bothered to actually watch The Dam Busters, he would know that the catchphrase, "steady... steady... down a little... etc" actually belonged to the bomb-aimer, Flight Officer F.M. "Spam" Spafford, not to Guy Gibson.

He might also have spotted a far more appropriate line with which to commemorate Richard Todd's death: the moment where in the role of Gibson he says, "Well, chaps – my watch says time to go."

I know that I should get out to the cinema more often.

Sincerely,
ANDREW McCRACKEN,

Grantown-on-Spey.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"You could visibly see him trying harder there as the frame went on. It might not have looked like it..."

JOHN PARROTT, BBC2
(Robin Elliott)

"He had to turn and swivel at the same time."

CHRIS KAMARA, Sky Sports
(John McCready)

"It is time for us to nail our colours to our chests."

ANDREW STRAUSS, BBC Radio Sussex
(Nigel Flynn)

"Robinho has been literally non-existent..."

LEE DIXON, Radio 5 Live
(Nick Kenway)

"They [Wolverhampton Wanderers] were hanging on for grim death..."

ALAN HANSEN, BBC1
(Ross Bowmaker)

Deadly wait

Sir,

Re: Deadly Wait, Letters, 1251. I would just like to thank A. Clergyman for his comments regarding the hurt caused to bereaved parents due to delays in post mortem on infants.

Our son, Gus, was born with hypoplastic left heart syndrome. That condition is serious enough on its own – unfortunately it was compounded by the MRSA which he contracted while in Birmingham Children's Hospital, and it was "complications" arising from the MRSA which eventually led to his death aged three months. Once that sad eventuality happened, my wife and I were both very keen to move swiftly to a private funeral and burial. We felt that the NHS had had dominion over Gus for the whole of his short life, and that we would like to control the manner of his final rest.

Sadly, we were told that his body had to be returned to Birmingham for an autopsy (we live in Bristol), where it remained for a number of weeks, causing huge distress to us, and our immediate families. In fact I would go so far as to say that this was one of the most stressful and upsetting periods of our lives.

If your article, and hopefully subsequent ones, can do anything to prevent other parents having to go through what we did after Gus's death, then you would doing them a huge service.

Regards
PETER BLACKMAN,

Bristol.

Lookalike

Blair

Donovan

Sir,

Re Jason Donovan and Tony Blair.

I wonder if any of your readers have noticed the similarity between the unconvincing former soap opera actor and Mr Jason Donovan...?

Yours ever,
DAN HARRISON,

Via email.

Brum tidings

Sir,

I am afraid that Piloti is a long way off the mark regarding his criticism of the new Birmingham Central Library (Nooks & Corners, Eye 1251). Firstly it is not the work of Milord Rogers but the Dutch architects Mecanoo.

Secondly, far from being built in a "less convenient" place it is being built less than one hundred metres away from the current site between the Birmingham Rep and the refurbished Baskerville House in the heart of Centenary Square. It will be within two minutes walk of both the ICC and Symphony Hall.

The current monstrosity of a library looks out of place compared to the Town Hall, Museum and Art Gallery and Council House being built over a roundabout on the inner ring road. As to its closest current neighbours they are McDonalds, Nando's and a Weatherspoons pub. Trust me as any one who lives or works in Birmingham will tell you Paradise Circus is far from a Paradise.

Yours faithfully,
IAN HARRIS,

Via email.

Sir,

Apologies, the pedant in me has taken control. Piloti's fingers may have slipped, but the website for the Save the Bradford Odeon campaign (Nook and Corners, Eye 1250) contained a typo. I would hate for people interested in this most worthy of campaigns to end up in the wrong place. That said, the "savetheoden" (Oops. Ed.) Wordpress account listed is still available to anyone wishing to preserve traditional Japanese winter dishes or, in fact, large Swedish icebreakers.

Yours pedantically,
ALEX PORTER,

Via email.

● The correct address is www.savetheodeon.wordpress.com. Ed.

Sir,

Re Nooks and Corners, Eye 1251. Piloti in his otherwise excellent defence of Chelsea Barracks garrison church shows a lack of knowledge (or geography) when he writes "the only surviving garrison church in the south of England". Unless it has moved since last I looked the excellent (listed) Colchester Garrison Church is in Southern England.

PETER KILBURN,

Via email.

Last Ever Pseudo Names. Maybe

... Pseudo Names will not be over until the fat lady has sung the last carol.

CY LENT-KNIGHT
HOLLY KNIGHT
ALISSA KALM
ALICE BRYTE.

... Will there be a special Christmas edition of Pseudo Names? We certainly hope so.

DEE
HOLLY
ANDY
IVY.

... I trust that Private Eye will be celebrating the Yuletide season with a traditional, holly-draped cover story?

MARY KRIST (Ms).

... Have you any plans for a compendium of Pseudo Names?

CHRIS MASPRESENT.

... Please don't leave the Pseudo Names feature without a home this Christmas.

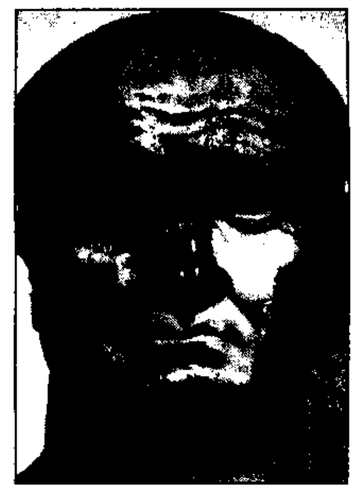
A. WAY
IAN A. MANGER
NOAH CRIBB-FAWE
A. BED.

... I'm hoping that my New Year's resolution for 2010 will be an improvement on 2009's.

SKYE H. DEE.

Lookalike

Vespasian



Crow

Sir,

After his triumphant appearance on Have I Got News For You, I was delighted to see that a grateful travelling public has erected a monument to the saviour of the British railway, Bob Crow.

Yours,
MARK DORRINGTON,

Cobham, Surrey.

Letter from **Canada**

from Our Own Correspondent

WE Canadians are generally law-abiding and police-respecting; so earlier this year many of us were shocked to discover exactly what happened when four burly members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) finally got their man back in 2007.

The four were attending a routine call at Vancouver Airport where Robert Dziekanski, a Polish tourist, was acting suspiciously. The confused, frightened visitor had been at the over-stretched and under-manned airport all day without anybody trying to help him. Nor had anybody had the sense to make a phone call or Tannoy announcement to ask for a Polish speaker to communicate with him.

The worst he had done was to shout and briefly pick up a chair. Otherwise he simply wanted some help. Within moments of the heavily armed cops arriving, however, Mr Dziekanski was dead.

The initial report of the incident from the highest-ranking officers in the RCMP was that Dziekanskii was violent and had to be controlled because of the risk he posed to the public. Friends, family and the Polish government claimed this was profoundly out of character.

Unfortunately for the boys in blue trousers with the yellow stripe, the whole thing had been secretly filmed by a passer-by and suddenly appeared on the internet. The police had been telling lots of fibs: to the Canadian people, press and even to the national parliament.

What actually happened was that the four obviously bored bobbies arrived and, rather than taking the time to speak to the man or try to walk him out of the area, repeatedly tazered him and then sat on him while he was on the ground. Their indifference to his safety shocked the nation.

Not to be outdone, in another incident the Toronto Metro Police – highly jealous of the RCMP whom they derisively call "The Queen's Cowboys" – decided on some startlingly original policing in Canada's largest city, where accusations of police racism are becoming routine.

Hard-working Chinese immigrant David Chen is a pillar of his community. A long-term victim of shoplifting who has been given little support by the police, he finally decided to give them a helping hand. He noticed a man who had earlier stolen from his shop return for a second crime. He and some friends caught the man, tied him up and held him until the police arrived.

When they did finally appear, the cops charged Chen with assault and kidnapping, which may earn him several years in prison. They agreed to drop most of the charges against the thief if he agreed to be a star witness against Mr Chen.

This follows a wave of fatal police shootings of members of ethnic minorities, including two mentally ill men – one West Indian and one Chinese – who were not carrying guns and who could have been, well, tazered. If only they'd been Polish and in an airport.

Chief of the Toronto police, Bill Blair, refuses to comment on most of these issues, but he needn't worry. The socialist mayor who appointed him, David Millar, is so unpopular he has announced that he is not running again and his successor is likely to clean house at police headquarters.

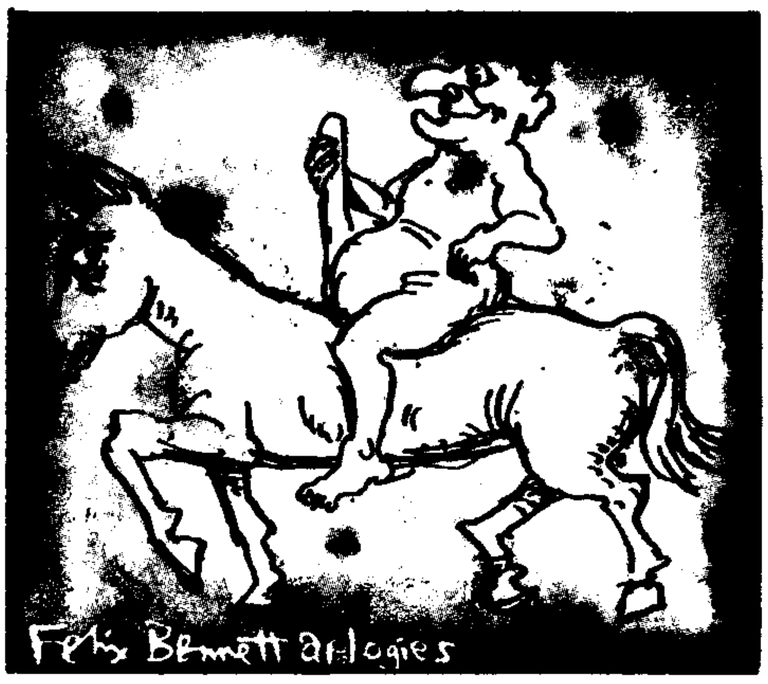
Miller himself has been a colossal failure as mayor, which came as no surprise to those who knew him when he was head boy at Lakefield College, one of the most expensive public schools in North America. His chum and classmate there was none other than your own Prince Andrew; and the two continue their friendship with specially marked letters sent from Toronto City Hall to the Duke of York. When Andrew comes to visit the mayor his security is provided by… the RCMP. Let's hope they don't get bored next time the Duke of Pork is in town.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Police kept telling me it couldn't possibly be the same guy again," Barbara Kenley told reporters at the Lazy B Stables near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, "but I couldn't believe there would be *two* guys doing the same thing to my dear horse Sugar. Two years ago, I'd found Rodell Vereen sleeping with Sugar in my stable, so I called the police, he pleaded guilty to having sex with Sugar, and they put him on the sex offenders list. So last month, when I noticed that Sugar was behaving oddly and had caught an infection, I immediately suspected the worst.

"I decided to install surveillance cameras in the stable, to monitor what was happening at night. And sure enough, when I checked the



tapes from July 19, there was the same man, standing in my stable, on my stool, buggering my horse. So I waited until he came back the next night, called the police, and held him at gunpoint until they arrived. He tried to deny it at first, but after I told him 'I have you on tape', he said Sugar was asking for it, then burst into tears, confessed everything, and claimed he was deeply in love with Sugar."

Kenley was speaking after the arrest of Rodell Vereen on charges of trespassing, buggery, and bestiality. Sgt. Robert Kegler of Horry County police added "when we came to arrest him, Ms Kenley told us she had thought about shooting him, and the only reason she didn't was because she didn't want to go to prison. We don't often investigate animal sex allegations round here. In fact, the last person charged with any sort of buggery in the entire county was Vereen himself, back in 2007."

Vereen was later sentenced to three years in prison. *(Bild [Germany], 5/11/09. Spotter Charl Du Plessis)*

– ● –

● *"Strictly against regulations, Captain Gerhard Lourens allowed a friend to sit with him inside the canopy of the Pilatus PC 7 Mk II," a spokesman for the Silver Falcons air display team told a press conference at Langebaanweg airfield, north of Cape Town. "The captain was showing off some manoeuvres, and when his plane was midway through a 360 degree loop, his friend tried to brace himself by grabbing onto the side of his seat. Unfortunately, he grabbed hold of the eject lever, and was immediately blasted through the jet's Perspex canopy and into the sky by the rocket-powered chair, before floating down to the ground on a parachute that opened automatically.*

"Civilians aren't allowed into these planes for a very good reason, because the firing handle only has to be pulled one inch upwards before it operates. Then you get one almighty kick under the backside as you experience 20G of acceleration, and you're gone. We train for this, because if you're not in the correct ejection posture, you can sustain severe spinal cord injuries or even worse. This man is lucky to be alive and unharmed." (Cape Argus, 2/11/09. Spotter: Dr Daniel Barker)

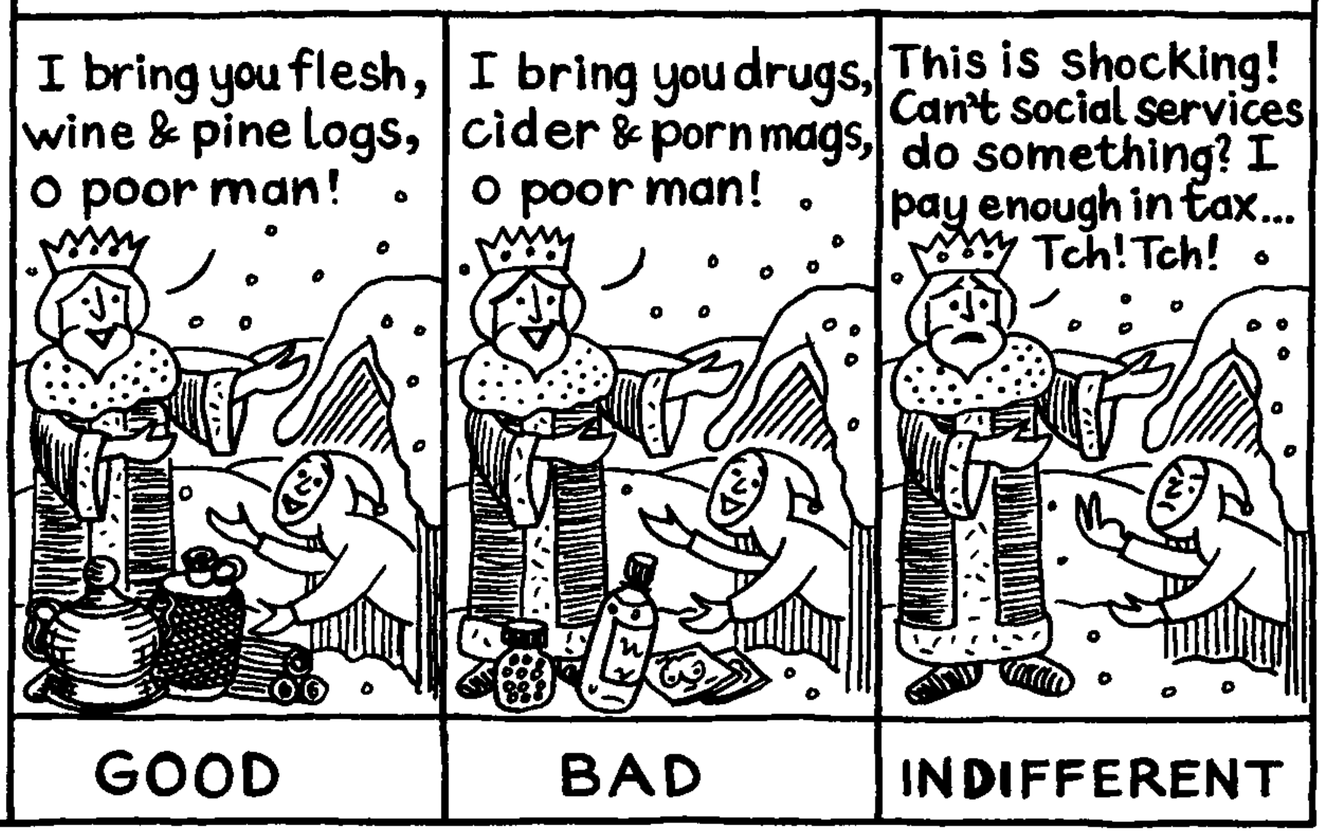
– ● –

● "When Aaron Siebers staggered into the Blockbuster Video Store with deep stab wounds to his lower leg, everyone believed he had been assaulted," police spokesman Steve Davis told reporters in Edgewater, Colorado. "He told his employers there that he had just been attacked on the street by three skinheads, so they rushed him to Saint Anthony's Hospital, where he received a blood transfusion, and numerous stitches to the leg wounds.

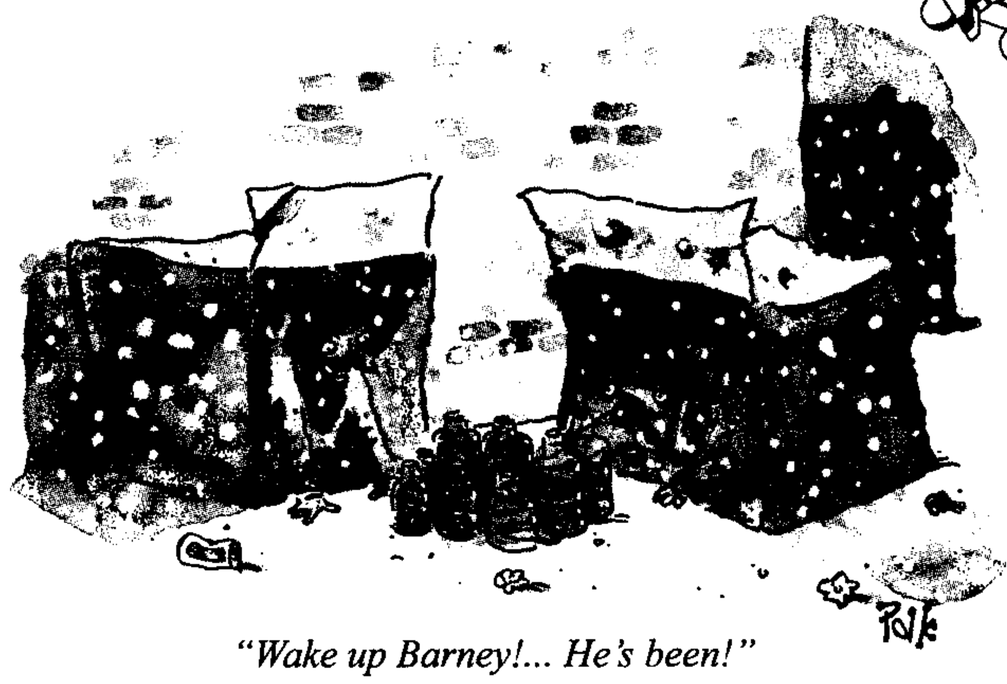
"Unfortunately for Siebers, police investigators examined surveillance camera footage from a nearby Target store, which showed Siebers limping from the bus stop to the Blockbuster store, without anyone attacking him at all. When confronted with this footage, he admitted that he'd actually stabbed himself in the leg several times just before getting off the bus, because he didn't want to go to work. So we arrested him for false reporting. This goes to show that, if you are going to concoct a story about being stabbed, don't do it near a Target store." *(Denver Post, 3/11/09. Spotter: Peter Owen)*

Apparently BY MIKE BARFIELD

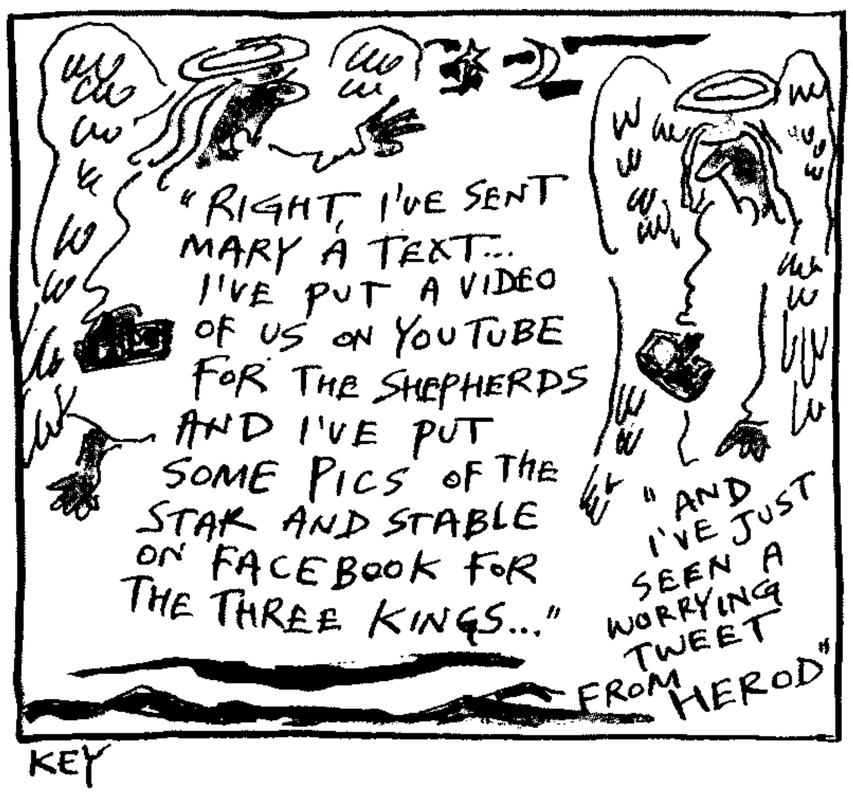
KINGS WENCESLAS: THE FULL RANGE


I bring you flesh, wine & pine logs, O poor man!
I bring you drugs, cider & porn mags, O poor man!
This is shocking! Can't social services do something? I pay enough in tax... Tch! Tch!
GOOD
BAD
INDIFFERENT

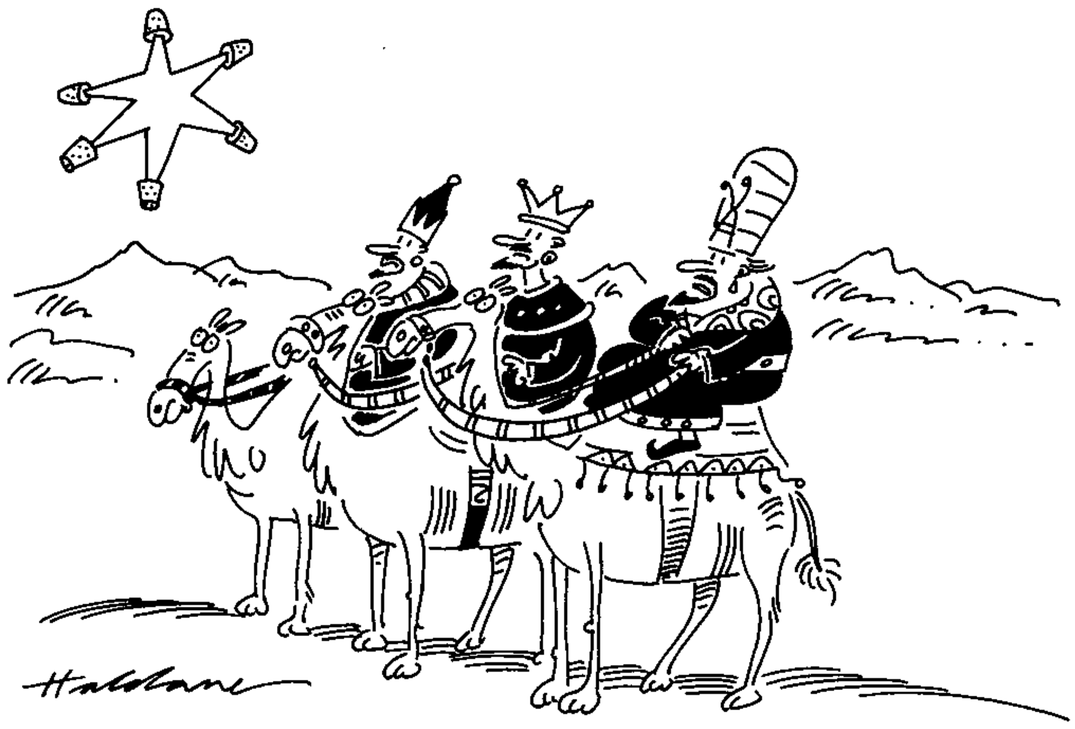
"It wouldn't be Christmas without Slade"



"Wake up Barney!... He's been!"


"RIGHT, I'VE SENT MARY A TEXT... I'VE PUT A VIDEO OF US ON YOUTUBE FOR THE SHEPHERDS AND I'VE PUT SOME PICS OF THE STAR AND STABLE ON FACEBOOK FOR THE THREE KINGS..."
"AND I'VE JUST SEEN A WORRYING TWEET FROM HEROD"
KEY

"It's from Social Services. They think Tiny Tim's faking it"



"It's Health and Safety gone mad"

"I've heard of this, it's called assisted suicide"

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 60

From the Igloo of the Supreme Leader in Snowbound Copenhagen

Comrades,

By the time you have received this personal message, I will have saved the world. Again.

Last week, you will recall, I flew to Copenhagen TWO DAYS BEFORE ANY OTHER HEAD OF GOVERNMENT (and obviously I offset the 439 tonnes of carbon dioxide emitted by my aeroplane by planting a 400-acre sustainable windfarm in the Sahara Desert).

And *the reason for my* daring and historic initiative was that I could see that the historic talks on saving the world from catastrophe were in danger of collapsing without any agreement being reached.

From all sides, the cry went up, "Where is the one man on the planet who at this eleventh hour could alone 'knock heads together' and force through the agreement needed to save the universe for our grandchildren?" And no, Mr Cameron, the answer to their question was not "He is in America worrying about healthcare". The statesman they all had in mind was very much nearer home. Yes, Comrades, you have guessed correctly!

It was your own Supreme Leader, ready as ever to step up to the plate and teach the world what being green really means.

That is why I immediately got on a plane for the Danish capital. (I would have caught the train, but they do not travel over the sea, and anyway, time was of the essence.)

My mission was to get the whole deal agreed, ready for Comrade President Obama to arrive and preside over the final ceremonies, by making one of those speeches everyone says he is so good at. You know, all that crowd-pleasing rhetoric about the "age of change" and so forth, which may not mean anything very much, but helps to keep people happy.

And, of course, it all went according to plan. I made my historic speech, pledging to give nearly £2 billion to all the poorer countries of the world (although, as Comrade Darling pointed out, these now include Britain, since we now owe more money than all the countries of Africa put together).

So, if they accept our offer, we shall end up giving ourselves our own money! Clever, eh?

Then came my masterstroke, which was to propose that above all we should all agree that an agreement should be reached. Obviously, the details could be left for another conference, perhaps in a year or two's time.

That was the breakthrough moment, and as I finished, the 20,000 delegates rose to their feet as one and started heading to the airport in their limousines, happy in the knowledge that the conference had been an unqualified success!

Comrades, I tell you, it was the proudest moment of my life – even prouder than the moment when I single-handedly saved the world's banking system!

Then it was merely the present day that was threatened with disaster. But now it was the entire future of mankind that was at stake (not forgetting the polar bears), and thanks to my initiative, this catastrophe had been averted in the nick of time!

Yours,

Gordon Brown

The Supreme Leader

A Personal Message From The Commissar For The People's Armed Forces Comrade Ainsworth

Comrades, I congratulate the Supreme Leader on yet another triumph in our ongoing series of victories in Afghanistan over the reactionary, feudal forces of Talibanist-al-Qaeda-ite warlordism. His latest act of genius has been to increase hugely the defence budget by cutting it in half. Only our beloved Supreme Leader could have been capable of such a remarkable feat.

Now our brave Armed Forces are to be equipped with new Chinook helicopters as early as 2014 – the very same helicopters which the Supreme Leader wisely decided not to buy five years ago – and which will now be ready to fly our troops out of Afghanistan when we withdraw them in 2013.

Yours,
Comrade Jobsworth
(Order of the Proletarian Moustache, 3rd Class)

THE BROONITES
THE CANNY CELTS CAROUSING AT CHRISTMAS!
Fountain and Jamieson
WHAT ON EARTH POSSESSED YE TAE LET PA BROON WORK AS OOR STORE SANTA?
BUT... HE'S VERRA POPULAR, TH' NOO.
SANTA'S GROTTO
HENRY DAVIES
OF COURSE HE IS, YE BAMPOT! IT'S LIKE THE BANKS ALL OVER AGAIN! THE KIDS HAVE ONLY GOT TAE TELL HIM THEY'VE BEEN NAUGHTY ALL YEAR ROOND...
...AND HE GIVES THEM ALL THE PRESENTS IN THE SHOP!
HERE LITTLE NAUGHTY BOY! HAVE A BONUS PRESENT FER BEIN' SO IRRESPONSIBLE!
JINGLES, XMAS AND HELP MA BAUBLES!

GNOME'S CHRISTM

INCREDIBLE SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH!

Somno-Vid

NOW YOU CAN re-live your dreams thanks to this amazing breakthrough in digital technology.

While you sleep, electro-magnetic waves transfer dream images from your brain to a scanning interceptor. You can then watch them on TV or computer.

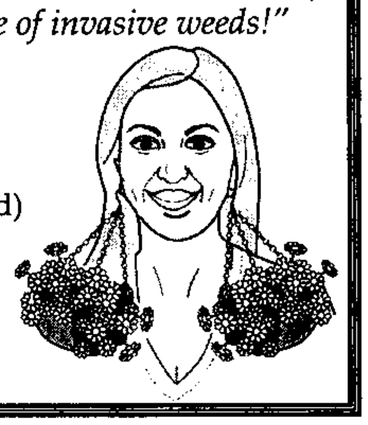
Ladies!

THE HANGING EARRINGS OF BABYLON

The elegance of designer jewellery coupled with the natural beauty of a hanging basket. Truly, the Hanging Earrings of Babylon are one of the wonders of the world!

Says BBC Radio's Gardeners' Question Time's Bob Flowerdew, "Beware of invasive weeds!"

(Plants, potting mulch, etc, not included)



Price: £599.99

The Fred Goodwin PIGGY BANK

A NOVEL way to save! Just put your loose change into Sir Fred's greedy gob and when he's stuffed full with your money – sent it off to the Royal Bank of Scotland!!

Genuine papier-mâché made from shredded internal documents.

PRICE £61 BILLION

Film Fans!

THE LYNN BARBIE DOLL™

Seen *An Education*, the heart-warming memoirs of Fleet Street's most famous journalist adapted by Nick Hornby?

Then you'll be first in line for the Doll of the Film.

Comes complete with:
● Tape recorder ● Bottle of wine ● Packet of fags

You can also buy Lynn Barbie's boyfriend Older Man Ken™

£99.99

AT LAST!

LUM-O TORCH

Say goodbye to where's-the-torch-now-the-lights-have-gone-out misery?

After years of research Finnish scientists have finally produced this breakthrough in 'Darkness Defeating Luminous Torch Technology'.

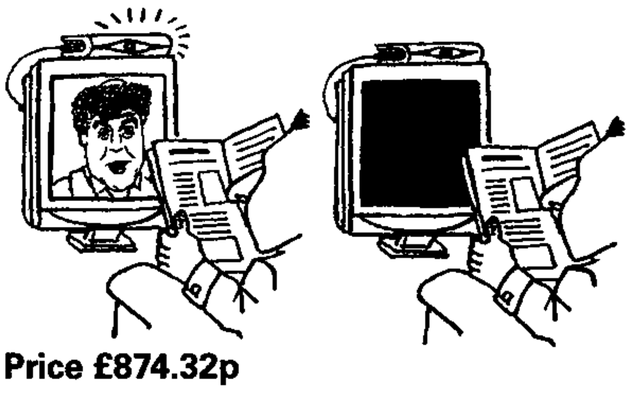
A must-have for every home, car, tent, garden shed, wine cellar.

£49.99
Batteries not included.

Plays theme tune from BBC TV's Wallander.

TV Lovers! **CLARKSGON**

JEREMY CLARKSON – it's hard to avoid seeing the BBC's Mr Petrolhead whenever you switch on. ***CLARKSGON***'s sensitive reactors respond instantly to his blokey tones and the device switches your set off – in seconds! Sit back, relax and read the newspaper. **Price £874.32p**



Warning! Newspaper may contain column by Jeremy Clarkson

SUDOKAY

No more hours of frustration puzzling over Sudoku.

Simply input the given numbers and WITHIN SECONDS the SUDOKAY completes the puzzle for you – however FIENDISH!

Price £12.99

INTRODUCING

The Air Plectrum™

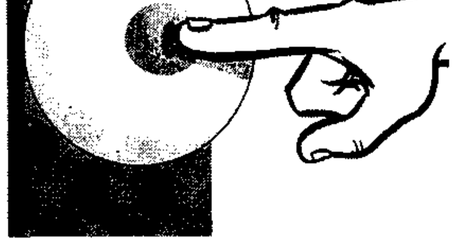
Air Guitar Lovers! At last the essential accessory that allows you to riff like the greats – yes! now you are Hendrix, Jimmy Page and Pete Townshend all rolled into one monster air axeman.

Box of ten Air Plectrums £19.99

Colours: Transparent, See-through, Air

Research Science Lovers!

Door Bell de Jour



At last your very own saucy door bell! Now you can imagine that you are having an exciting secret life as an escort girl, just like TV's Belle de Jour!!

♪ CHOICE OF RING TONES:
The Stripper, Roxanne, Voice of Leslie Phillips saying 'Ding! Dong!'

Price £79.99 *(Batteries extra)*

BOOK LOVERS!

Embarrassed to be seen reading an e-book? Just place your electronic reader inside the

BOUND-2-READ

This authentic leather-style book jacket with gold-style embossed title and author will allow you to rediscover the classic reading experience.

Choice of titles: ***Proust's*** Anna Karenina, ***Tolstoy's*** Bleak House, ***Dickens'*** Pride and Prejudice.

Jacket colours: ***Graham Greene, T.H. White, Dan Brown*** £259.99

Introducing The Amazing

Wi-Fido™

THIS incredible technological breakthrough from Korea does away with old-fashioned dog leads for ever!! With a silicon chip, impulse-activated collar and wi-fi compatible joystick handset, you can tell Fido, "turn left, turn right, don't run in front of that bus".

£399.99

WARNING: May not work in some wi-fi blackspots such as parks, streets etc.

Ever fancied eating your chopping board? Well now you can with...

CHOCOLATE-CHOP™

YES! This all-chocolate chopping board doubles as a fully operational kitchen accessory AND a tasty snack for when you're cooking! Mmmmmmm!

Flavours: *Chocolate 'n' onion, chocolate 'n' chicken, chocolate 'n' gherkin.* **£37.99**

AS MART

NEW! GNOME'S THRIFTMART

Baffled by all those bins?

OMNI-BIN HOME RECYCLER

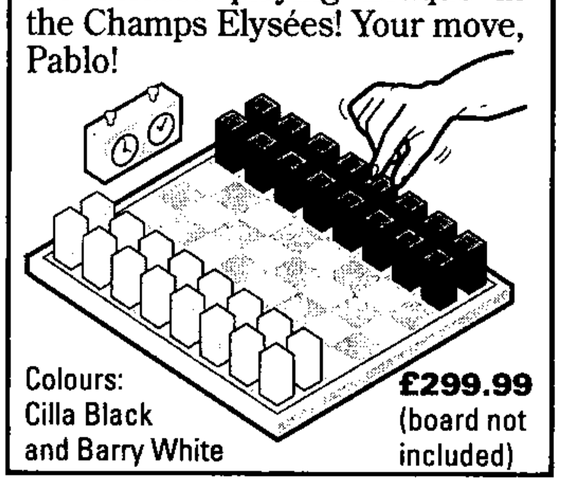
Say goodbye to the misery of sorting your *rubbish for the council bin-men.*

Let **OMNIBIN** do the work. Simply tip in your refuse and the conveyor belts of the machine sort it into the correct receptacle *(self-assembly).* **£1299.99**

Game lovers!

CUBIST CHESS SET

This beautifully crafted set of Cubist pieces, made from onyx-style Gnomolene, is not only a fun game but is also a lasting tribute to the masters of the Modern movement. Imagine you are Picasso playing Braque in the Champs Elysées! Your move, Pablo!



Colours: Cilla Black and Barry White

£299.99 (board not included)

The EVERLASTING TURKEY

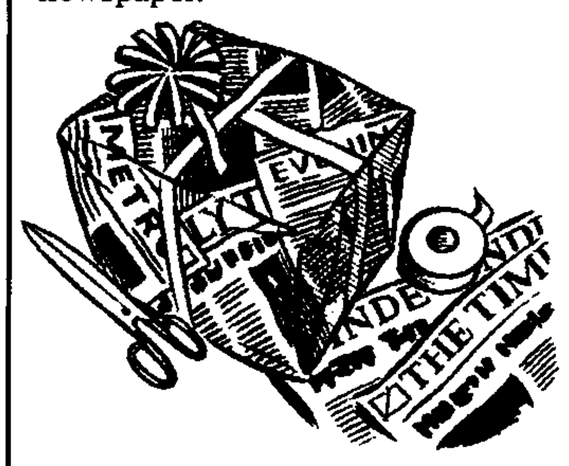
Looks just like the real thing, but is actually made from 100% sustainable plastic. Guaranteed to last a lifetime.

Simply present turkey with all the trimmings – eat trimmings, put turkey away until next year!

£3.99 (plus p&p)

NEWSPAPER-THEMED WRAPPING PAPER

Good **News** this Christmas! Gift wrap your presents with this original novelty giftwrap designed to look just like your favourite newspaper.



Choose from: *Independent, Times, Daily Telegraph, Metro, E. Standard,* etc.

£2 6 sheets

Bungalow Dwellers! Introducing the

"No-Stairlift"

Why should stair-owning senior citizens have all the fun?! Now single-floor dwellers can travel effortlessly round their bungalows – just like their two-floor friends! Just put your feet up and, hey presto, you're gliding into the spare room!

Price: £11,999.99

Plays theme tune to TV's Top Gear

Musical Novelty

THE WORLD'S FIRST

SILENT RECORDER

Countless parents suffer in silence from the piercing hoots and squeaks of recorder practice.

Equipped with digital personalised ear plugs, now only junior will hear the "music".

[redacted]

The X-MAS BOX™

The perfect gift for every toddler!

We all hear it every Christmas: "Little Wayne/ Beyonce ignored the present and played with the box all day!" Now you can *just* give them the box!!

Hours of cheap, cheerful fun, the X-Mas Box is made from Fairtrade recycled cardboard.

The X-Mas Box comes in the following styles:

● Sainsbury's own-brand baked beans ● Tesco's value cornflakes ● Lidl's Turkish brandy

£1.99 Box of 12 boxes

VIRTUAL CHRISTMAS TREE

Say goodbye to expensive, messy, cumbersome REAL Christmas trees!!

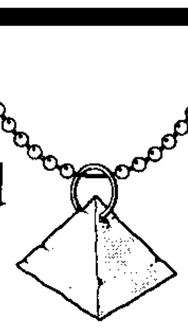
This state-of-the-art CGI-generated DVD provides a perfect fairytale Xmas tree that no money could ever buy!!! Simply pop into DVD player and, hey presto!, Christmas is here!!

● Fully decorated, with choice of fairy or star on top, twinkling lights and piles of needles on floor.

Plays: *Football's Coming Home* by Baddiel and Skinner

£2.99

The Lucky Pyramid Of Madoff



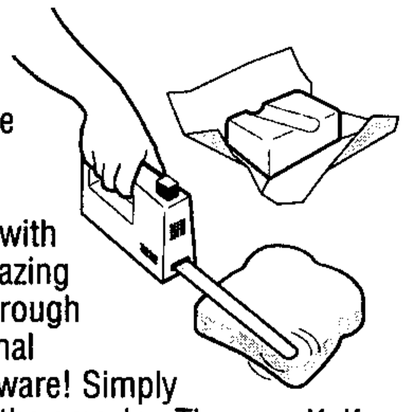
For centuries the inhabitants of the remote Bulgarian province of Ponzi have trusted in the mystical properties of the Madoff Lucky Pyramid. They believe that the wearer of the pendant will receive huge good fortune and wealth beyond their dreams. Now you too can share their supernatural luck.

Price: $100,000 (plus p&p)

WARNING: Due to unprecedented demand, your Pyramid of Madoff may suffer indefinite delays in arrival. Investment is not refundable.

New from Zimbabwe

THERM-O-KNIFE



Say goodbye to hard butter misery with this amazing breakthrough in thermal kitchenware! Simply plug in the amazing Therm-o-Knife and the micro filaments in the blade automatically turn frozen butter into melted dairy gold!

Says TV's Greg Wallace: "It's like a knife... THROUGH BUTTER!"

[redacted]

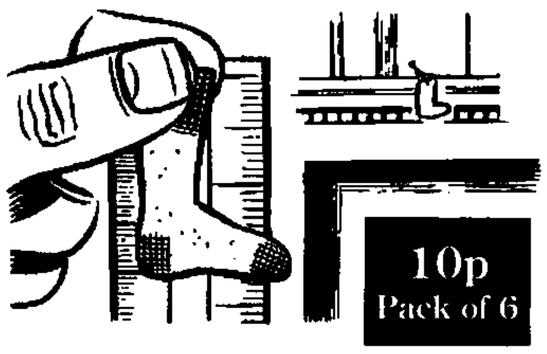
Plays theme tune from BBC's hit TV show "Cranford"

Save On Gifts With

SANTA'S BONSAI XMAS STOCKING

No bigger than your little finger, the Bonsai Stocking is guaranteed to hold up to one tiny gift only! Kids will love it as they rummage through the Bonsai Stocking on Xmas morning – and you'll be smiling!!

Colours: Gordon Brown, Black Wednesday, In The Red.



10p Pack of 6

DESIGNER LABELS

Make your garment gift look a million dollars! Simply stick in a designer label and turn your Primark pullover into a Hugo Boss blouson!!

Watch the faces of your loved ones light up with delight!

Famous names include: Ralph Lawrence, Abercrombie and Fish, Channel, Kevin Kline, Marks & Spencer.

Warning: *Made from eco-friendly recycled paper. Do not put in the wash.*

£1.50 Pack of 10

BRITTON INQUIRY (DAY ONE)

'I WOULD HAVE INVADED IRAQ EVEN IF BUSH HADN'T TOLD ME TO'

Blair's shock admission

by Our Religious Staff **BILL GODDIE**

ON THE first day of the wide-ranging BBC inquiry into the role of former prime minister Blair in the Iraq war, the chairman Sir Fernwell Britton asked the chief witness Mr Blair whether religion had played a big part in his life at 10 Downing Street.

"Look," said Britain's former war leader, "going into Iraq would have been the right thing to do, even if it was the wrong thing."

■ Watch again the full version of Fern Britton's incredible and history-making interview with the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, which the BBC carefully broadcast early on Sunday morning at a time when nobody is watching (the so-called 'Frost slot') because it was about religion.

NEW LAW TO ALLOW WORLD LEADERS TO VISIT BRITAIN SAFELY

by Our Legal Correspondent **Joshua Rosenbeard**

MPs expressed outrage last night over an emergency Bill proposed by the government which will make it impossible for visiting world statesmen to face arrest for war crimes when they enter Britain.

The issue has arisen following attempts by pressure groups to indict Mr Tony Blair, a former British prime minister, when he recently made one of his rare visits to Britain.

Livni And Let Livni

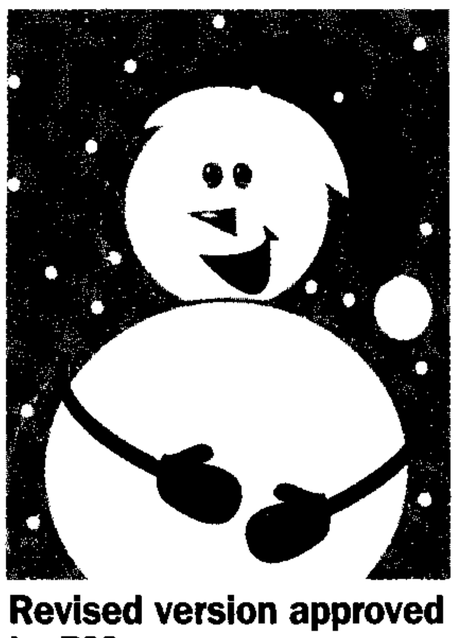
Alan Milbank, Chairman of the UK Friends of Blair group, last night said, "It is outrageous that someone of Tony's standing in the world cannot even come here to make an after dinner speech to a group of local Rotarians for a token fee of £2 million without the threat of being put into prison as a major war criminal.

Missy Tzipi

"It is absurd to call Tony a war criminal just because he invaded Iraq for no good reason, resulting in the deaths of a million innocent people. Why, next you will be saying that the Israelis were up to no good when they killed all those people in Gaza." *(Cont. p. 94)*

Alistair Darling's Christmas Card 2009

Original design



Revised version approved by PM

ME AND MY SPOON

SIR JOHN CHILCOT

Do you start with any specific views on spoons?

Can I make it clear at the outset that I don't see it as my role to single out any particular spoon as superior or inferior to any other?

So how do you see your role on the spoon issue?

I am not in the business of praise or blame. I am here to give everyone the opportunity to talk about spoons in the frankest possible way – although of course there will be occasions when it is necessary for those views to be heard in secret.

Doesn't it look to the public as though you're engaged in some kind of a whitewash?

No. That would be absurd. You can't whitewash a spoon. Washing-up liquid, possibly, although I am quite open to alternatives, such as Spoon-o-Glit or Mr Gleem.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

[redacted]

(Sir John's answer to this question had to be given in secret)

NEXT WEEK: *Ron Wood – Me And My Wood.*

POETRY CORNER

Lines on the departure of Sir Terence Wogan from BBC Radio Two's Breakfast Show

So. Farewell
Then
Terry Wogan.

The cheery voice
Of Middle
England.

TOGs.

Yes, they were
Your invention –
Terry's Old Geezers
Or Gals.

Now that
Chris Evans
Is taking
Over
Keith wonders
If it will
Still be
TOGS –

Turn Off
Ginger's
Show?

E.J. Thribb (17½)

Yours sincerely

Nigel

Nigel Jackson
Affluent Director (Non Regulated)
Private Banking

NatWest Private Banking

If undelivered please return to:
Gaurdian News & Media Ltd

Mailing shot

"Why do old people always hang around all day in bus shelters?"

HOW THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION WAS MADE

No 94
The Pocket Borough

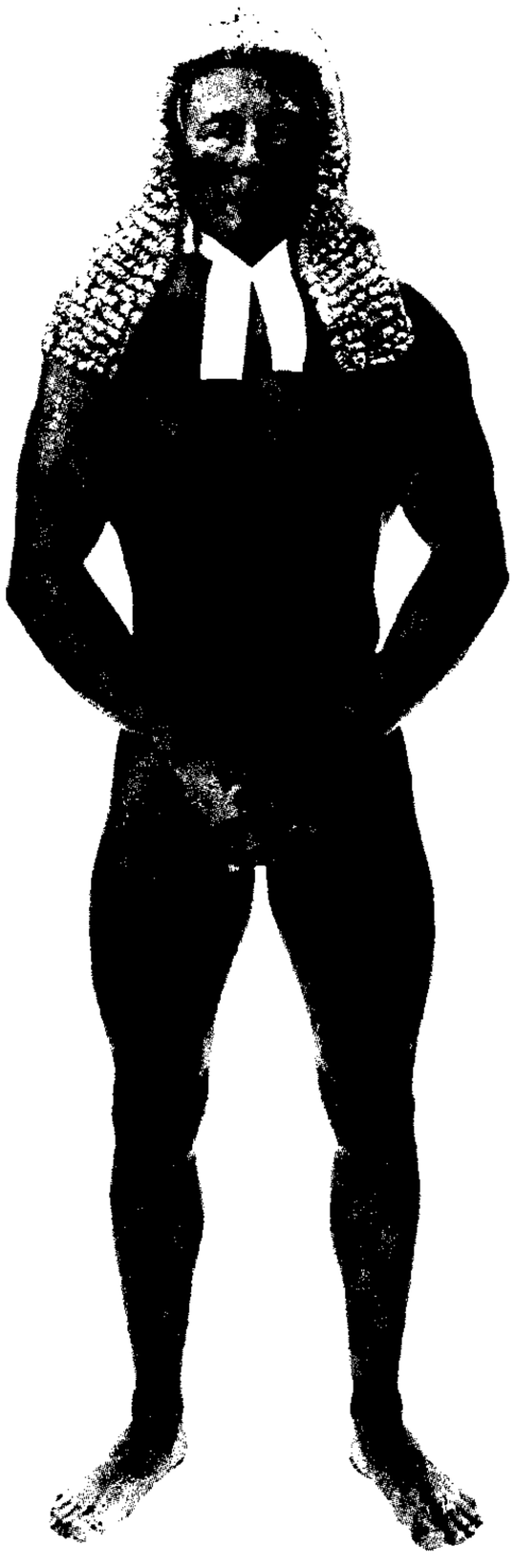
INCREDIBLE as it may seem today, in those days a very rich man could literally buy his way into Parliament by way of what was known as a "pocket borough".

One particularly notorious example concerned the constituency of Richmond in Surrey, which was acquired in this manner for the sum of £264,000 by a well-known gambler of the time, Sir Zachariah Goldsmith.

Sir Zachariah had inherited a fabulous fortune from his father, the billionaire fishpaste manufacturer, Sir Jammy Goldfish. He used his fortune to buy political influence on an enormous scale, which led to widespread protests from the "toff-bashing" radicals of the day.

The leader of the Conservative Party Sir David Cameron, a close friend of Sir Zachariah's from their school days at Eton, was so swayed by the force of their protests that he passed the celebrated great Non-Reform Act, which allowed Zac to do whatever he liked, as they needed the money.

■ For full Revision Notes on History GCSE: Part 94, go to our website: easypass.co.uk/nationalcurriculum



Legal Announcement

by Justice E.D. Cocklecarrot

I HEREBY give notice that the publication of any picture circulating in this country or any country in the world or indeed any other world including what is popularly known as cyberspace that purports to show myself without any clothes on be it the whole body *omnis corpus* or any portion thereof *res pudenda* shall constitute an act of *Scandalum Magnatum* rendering those responsible liable to criminal prosecution, such prosecution to be heard in person by myself *in camera*, empowered as I am to impose a maximum penalty in this instance of death by hanging, and may God have mercy on your soul, whomsoever ye may be.

A picture of the type that has been injuncted and publication of which is forbidden in any circumstances whatsoever is shown left.

Private Eye Christmas Charity Auction

Here are just some of the dazzling experiences that readers can bid for in our annual charity appeal.

1. Tea with Polly Filler

Your chance to take *Eye* columnist Polly Filler to tea at the Ritz Hotel, along with her lovable toddler Charlie!

2. An Evening with Dave Spart

The winner gets to sit on the platform alongside legendary revolutionary spokesperson Dave Spart, as he speaks for five hours at a "Troops Out!" rally organised by the Tufnell Park branch of the Friends of the Taliban.

3. Work alongside top journalist Phil Space

The winner gets to assist award-winning Phil Space as he compiles the Eye's list of "The Top 100 Lists Of The Decade" with the aid of Google and Wikipedia.

4. A trip with London's top columnist-cum-cab-driver

The winner gets to pay for a ride (one way) to Heathrow or any airport of his/her choice (within the M25 area) and hear at first-hand the views of cab-driver "Dick" Littlejohn on a wide range of matters from immigration to immigration.

5. A Weekend Retreat led by the *Eye*'s Religious Commentator, Rev. J.C. Flannel

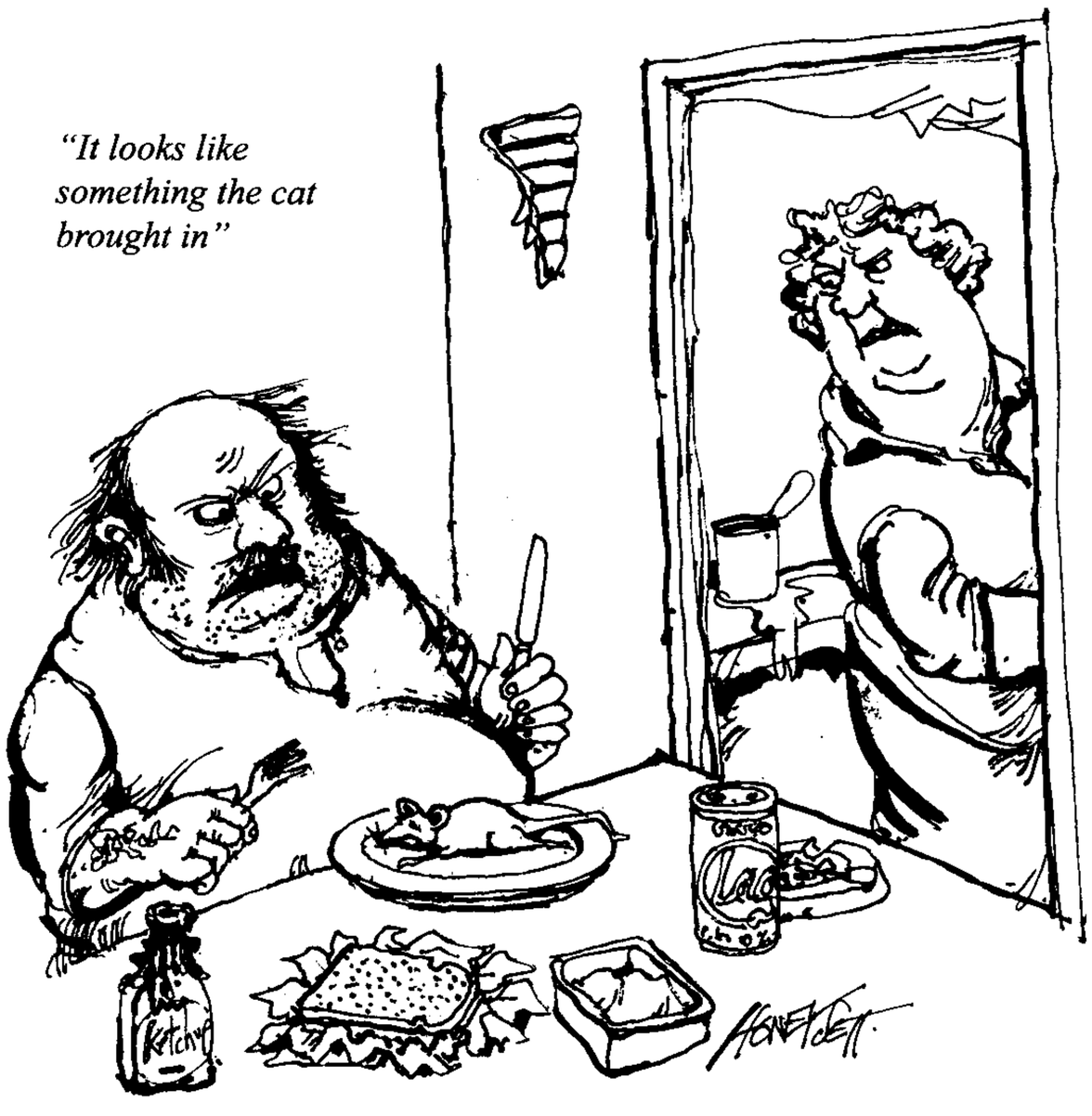
The winner gets to attend a three-day-long meditation taken by Rev. Flannel at a country house venue near Milton Keynes. Day One: "On the one hand". Day Two: "On the other hand". Day Three: "In a very real sense".

6. A "Hot Date" with famed columnist and goodtime girl Glenda Slagg

The winner gets to "date" fun-loving Glenda, the doyenne of Fleet Street. Will she loveya? Will she hateya? Or will she just be sickofya? Who knows? Take a couple of bottles round to her place and find out!!?!!?

All this year's donations will go to our 2009 Charity of Choice – The Lord Gnome Home For Distressed Bankers, Grand Cayman.

"It looks like something the cat brought in"



DAVID CAMERON S

AVATORY

A tale of blue weirdos who talk a bizarre language in the not-too-distant future

"The most expensive disaster in history"

"I say, Dave, can you get me a job?"

'BONKING TAX WILL HURT CAPITAL,' Says Johnson

LONDON Mayor Boris Johnson yesterday condemned the government's proposal for a 'Bonking Tax'.

Speaking on the BBC's Andrew Gurn show, the Tory Mayor blustered, "It would only work with an international bonking agreement. A supertax on bonking would only encourage Britain's top bonkers, like myself, to go overseas and bonk elsewhere.

"We should be removing all obstacles to bonking, so that international bonkers, like Tiger Woods, should be encouraged to bally well bonk over here."

Mr Johnson later added, "A banking tax? Oh well, that's a tommy rot idea too."

BBC Radio 3

Opera Latest

The Punchback of Notre Duomo

by Berlusconi

Act One

THE Robber Baron is staging a huge party in one of his many palaces, to celebrate all his achievements over the past year. He sings **Sono tutti fabuloso** *(I am the most handsome man in Italy).*

The crowd applauds wildly, singing the chorus **Te amore Silvio** *(We can't wait for your fourth term).*

The indefatigable Silvio then bares his chest to the assembled courtesans and dancing girls who are admiringly thronging round him and sings the aria **No vesti la giubba** (*See, I am so tough that I do not wear a vest*).

Act Two

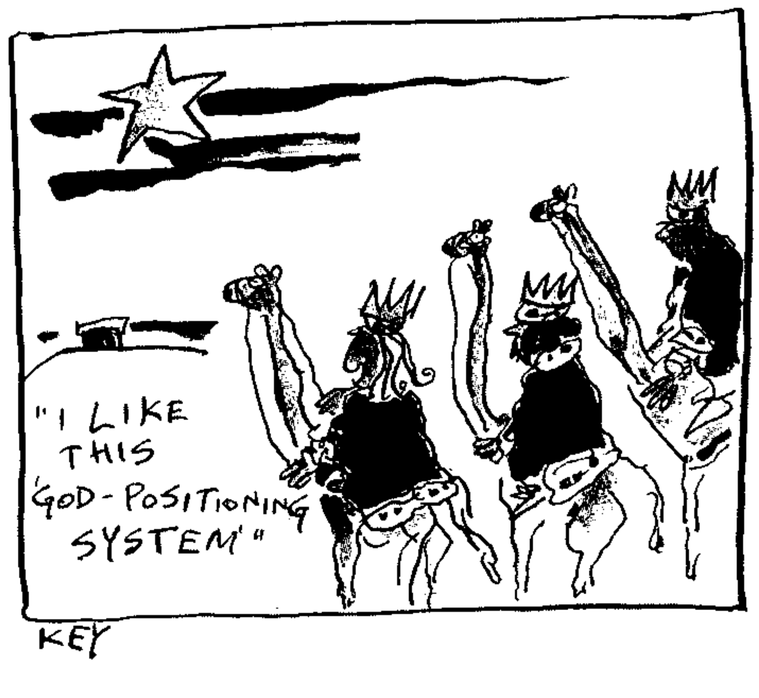
The Robber Baron's display of hubris swiftly brings an unexpected nemesis. The village idiot breaks through the throng singing the taunting aria **Where is Silvio, who is he?** (cleverly borrowed from Schubert). In an act heavy with symbolism, he hits Silvio over the head with a life-size model of the Milan Cathedral. The crowd gasps in horror, as Silvio falls blooded to the floor.

The chorus mournfully sings **La commedia è finita** (*Looks like the party's over*).

Act Three

The curtain rises on an empty square. A lone news vendor enters, singing the sensational headline **Il trionfo di Silvio.** It transpires that, following the assault, the Baron has soared in popularity. In fact, he has never been so loved by his people.

Silvio is then wheeled on in his hospital bed, surrounded by a chorus of semi-naked nurses, and sings **All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth**. As festal bells ring out, everyone joins in with the closing chorus: **Tutte che voglio per Natale e i miei due denti frontale.**



From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Christmas toy controversy

First the smugglers did no more than sell children Chinese cigarettes made from asbestos. Then the Americans did no more than produce Mr Squiggles the hamster whose nose did no more than allegedly contain double the recommended safe level of antimony. Inasmuch and insofar as they did so do, then they did no more than offer a test of Christian faith. No baptised child need fear any deadly poison, for it will not hurt them (Mark 16:18). Then the Chinese did no more than send forth toy mice that sing "Jingle Bells" in a way that some ears hear as "Paedophile! Paedophile!" Inasmuch and insofar as they did so do, then they did no more than confirm the Lord's warning that He will send evil creatures among us (Ezekiel 5:17). – ***Mr_Salmon***

Even without squeezing his stomach to unleash the revolting catch phrase, it is obvious what we are dealing with. With his horrid hat and shifty gaze this rodent is of a piece with those rat-faced urchins taught by Zanu Labour to ruin the reputations of decent citizens with malicious allegations. – ***Brown_out***

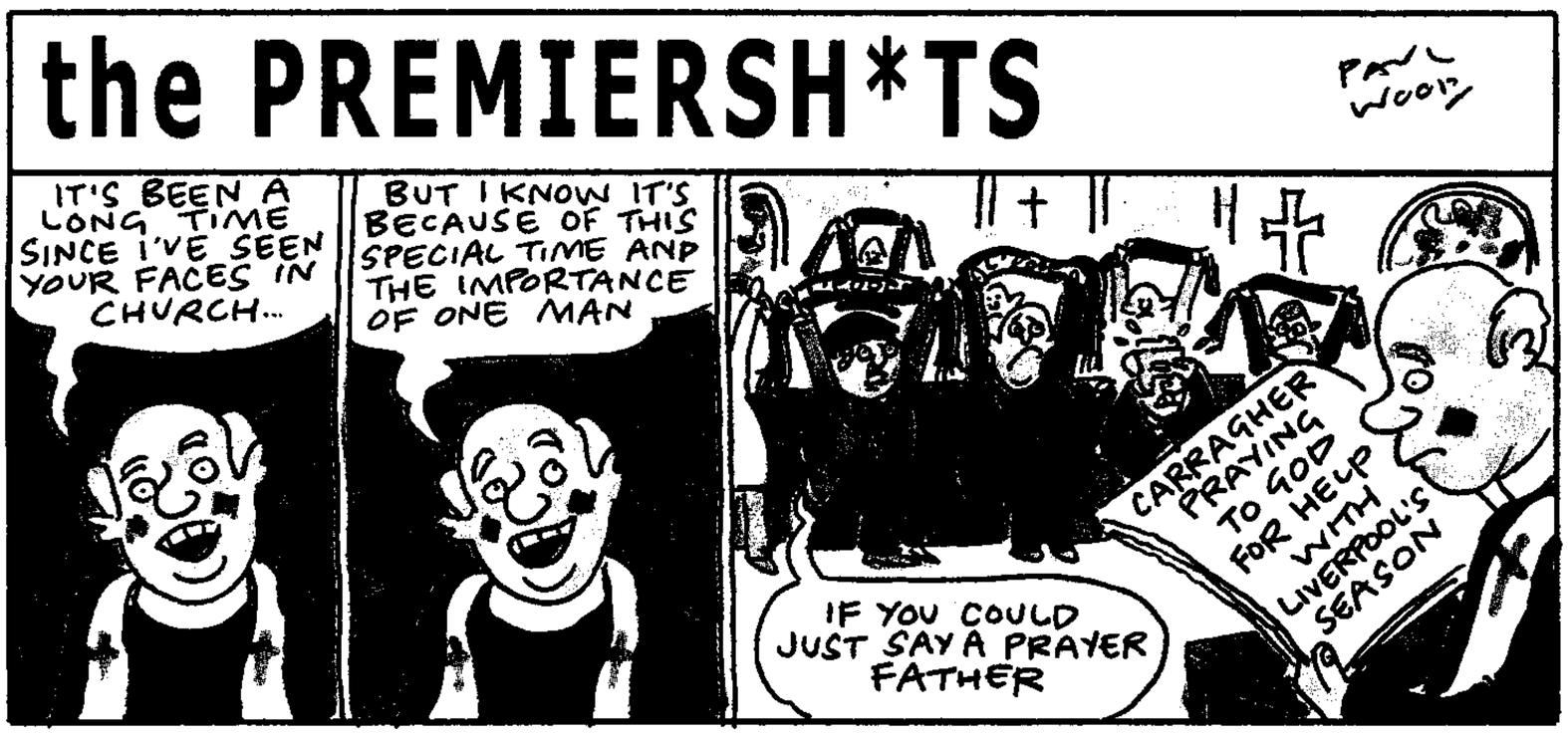
Interesting that the gay policemen and their surrogate "son" are keeping very quiet about this. – ***Metric_Martyr***

Mice are wanton beasts. They will not cease until they have satisfied their unnatural desires. Believe me I know. – ***Mary_Ann***

Any mouse comes near my girls I swear Ill do time – ***Family_man***

My heart went out to the poor lady who bought the paedophile mouse for her kids. But then I read her comment, "Luckily my children are too young to understand." LUCKILY?! Lucky that her own kids have suffered at the most vulnerable time of their lives?!! She is worse than the perverts who made this vile toy. – ***Rot_in_hell_Myra***

hope the bitch die's at crismas ● god bless her little orphen's ☺ – ***Justice_4_Maddie***


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOD
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I'VE SEEN YOUR FACES IN CHURCH...
BUT I KNOW IT'S BECAUSE OF THIS SPECIAL TIME ANP THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE MAN
IF YOU COULD JUST SAY A PRAYER FATHER
CARRAGHER PRAYING TO GOD FOR HELP WITH LIVERPOOL'S SEASON

DAILY TEHRANAGRAPH

Friday, December 25, 2009

Storm Grows as Leader Refuses to Renounce Nuclear Ambitions

by London Staff **Our Man In A Dinner Jacket**

THE increasingly deranged British leader, the Ayatollah Gordoni, yesterday stepped up his plans for his country to maintain an independent nuclear capability, despite strong pressure from Iran and the increasing doubts of his own people at home.

Gordoni, however, is adamant that Britain's Trident missiles are only there for peaceful purposes, and that Britain has no desire to threaten its neighbours.

The hugely expensive nuclear programme is fast bankrupting the country, whose students have already taken to the streets to do their Christmas shopping.

In addition, workers in the key aviation industry are threatening to go on strike through the period of the religious festival known as Xmas, when Britain's millions of devout agnostics traditionally get drunk, eat turkeys and watch television.

WOODS TAKES BREAK

NEWS was emerging last night that Tiger Woods is planning to take what has been described as an "indefinite break" from extra-marital affairs for the foreseeable future.

A spokesman for Mr Woods said, "For the past decade, Tiger has been focused on becoming the world's number one philanderer, something which has put an immense strain on his relationship with those he holds most dear – namely Gillette, TAG Heuer and Nike".

On Other Pages

● **Media Don't Take Break From Tiger Woods Story**

CHILDREN'S CLASSICS UPDATED

The Tiger Who Came to Tee

One day a Tiger came to tee. Then he shagged everything that moved until his wife found out and he didn't come to tee again.

MAN BEATS OTHER MAN IN SINGING CONTEST

by Our Entire 20 Million Staff

A LARGE number of people recently watched the televised final of a singing competition on television.

The winner, an 18-year-old man who is able to sing, is now expected to go on to enjoy a significant amount of commercial success, while the loser, a 25-year-old man (also able to sing), will only go on to enjoy a slightly less significant amount of commercial success.

More than ten million people voted in the two-hour final of the competition, which featured both men singing a song and some other men singing songs inbetween the songs sung by the first two men. After everybody had finished singing and voting for which of the two singers they thought was better, the winner was announced and everyone present went home.

Advertisement

❄ YES, IT'S SUBO AT CRIMBO! ❄

The new best-selling album from the world's number one female vocalist. Including: ❄

Boyle to the World ❄

The First Cowell ♫

Simon Night

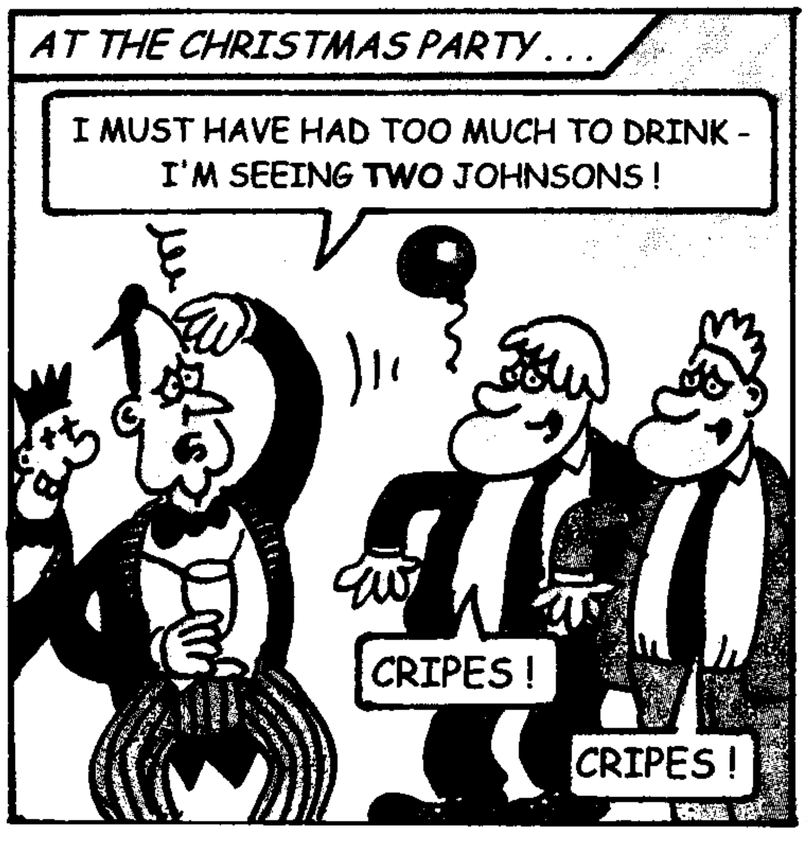
Dec the Ant (with Bags of Lolly)

Away in the Priory ♪ ❄

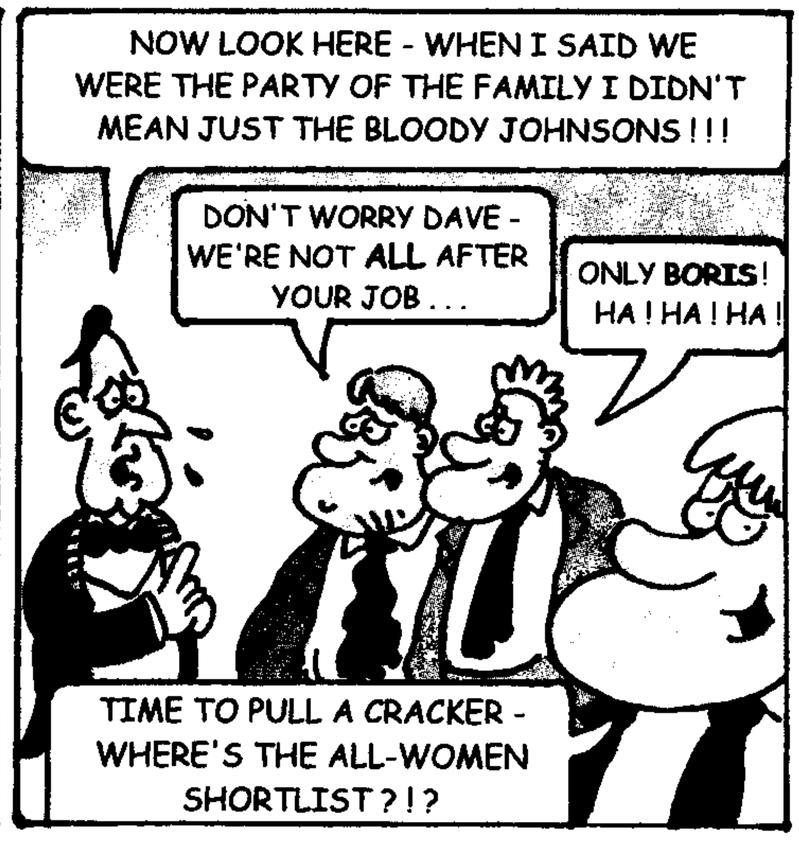
(Shurely shome mishtake?)

Hurry, hurry, while SuBo lasts!

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS



NO, DAVE ! IT'S JOHNSON MINOR - MY BABY BRO JO
SURELY WE'VE GOT SOMEONE ELSE WHO WANTS TO BE A TORY MP ! ? !
OH BROTHER !
YES, THERE'S MY PATER STANLEY - AND MY SISTER RACHEL, PROBABLY !
EGG NOG B


NOW LOOK HERE - WHEN I SAID WE WERE THE PARTY OF THE FAMILY I DIDN'T MEAN JUST THE BLOODY JOHNSONS ! ! !
DON'T WORRY DAVE - WE'RE NOT **ALL** AFTER YOUR JOB . . .
ONLY **BORIS** ! HA ! HA ! HA !
TIME TO PULL A CRACKER - WHERE'S THE ALL-WOMEN SHORTLIST ? ! ?

Your Pick Of The Holiday Season TV Films

Christmas Eve Tuesday

4pm **Shrek 17**

MORE animated fun as we see the elderly King Shrek deciding to invade the neighbouring kingdom of Irakland. Can wisecracking Donkey save his friend from such a disastrous error? Listen out for the voice of Donny Rumsfeld, as Pinocchio, Shrek's chief adviser.

Boxing Day Friday

10.15am **Meet The Grandparents 4**

WILLS and Katie have been going steady (despite a few ups and downs on the way), but now comes the big test. She's got to meet his grandparents – grumpy old man Phil and ice queen Brenda. Will their love survive the ordeal? Watch out for Alison Steadman's hilarious performance as Katie's former air hostess mother.

Holiday Wednesday

3.30pm **They Flew To Bruges In 3D**

SENSATIONAL 2007 remake of the classic wartime thriller, using all the tricks of 3D technology. The low-level sequence shot over the Belgian countryside looks like it is unfolding in your own front room! Stephen Fry excels in the role of Squadron Leader 'Chalky' Chalkington, originally played by Kenneth More.

Glenda Slagg

The Bird That Needs Stuffing At Christmas! (You're fired. Ed)

■ **HATS OFF to Pamela Anderson!!?!! She's the busty babe who's swapped *Baywatch* for panto!!?!! What a trouper!?! OK, she can't act, she can't sing and she can't dance!?! Who cares – she's got two things going for her!?!! Geddit?!? And she'll gladden the heart of every dad as she appears in Aladdin a-jigglin' and a-wigglin' in her spangly swimsuit!?! No wonder my colleague Quentin Letts had to be carried out just before the sing-song!?!!? All together now – "Pam is busting out all over!" Pure Genie-us!!?! Geddit?**

■ PAMELA Anderson!!?!! Who does she think she is, this two-bit bimbo from *Baywatch* coming over here and turning our pantomime into a pantomime!?!! Geddit? Face it, love, you've only got two things going for you and they're not up to much nowadays!?!! No disrespect, Pammy, but the only place for you is the back end of the horse!?!! So shame on you, Quentin Letch!?!! A-dribblin' and a-droolin' all over the footlights!?!! Pammy – go back to Hollywood and leave our panto to the professional likes of Sir Ian McKellen!??!! All together now – Booooo-bs!!?!! Geddit?

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Christmas Cuties!?!

● **Quentin Davies.** He's the one with the bell tower!?! Ding! Dong! You can ring my bell any time, Big Boy!?!!

● **Speaker Bercow**. If you like the kind of lady who gets drunk and sleeps with anyone – then I'm your gal!?!!

● **Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth.** Crazy moustache!?! Crazy guy!?!

Byeee!!

The Alternative Rocky Horror Service Book

No. 94 New African Liturgy for the Summary Execution of Homosexuals.

Bishop Onanugu *(for it is he)*: We are gathered here to administer the holy sacrament of Execution to our brother N'__ or M'__.

All: String him up! *(Or they may say, "Hanging is too good for him").*

Onanugu: Who casteth the first stone?

Congregation: We do.

(There shall then be a Reading from the Book of the Black Cabbie [Kampala Cabs No. 1274] vs. 1-3)

Reader: No, don't get me wrong, guv, I've got nothing against them, but let's face it, they should all die. I 'ad that Peter Tatchell in the back of the cab once. He was lucky to get out alive.

All: Thanks be to God.

(The congregation shall then sing Hymn no. 94 "The Gay Though Gavest Lord Has Ended")

The Peace

(Here the congregation shall give each other a sign of peace)

Onanugu: Nothing too friendly, boys, or I might start to think you are a bunch of shirtlifters and you'll wind up on the end of my rope!

All: Point taken, boss.

The Dismissal

(The congregation will dismiss the views of the Archbishop of Canterbury by the ancient act of voodoo, according to the extreme rites of the Anglican Church of Christ Witch Doctor)

Onanugu: You may now come forward and stick pins in this effigy of the Right Reverend Rowan Willliams.

All: Take that, Beardie!

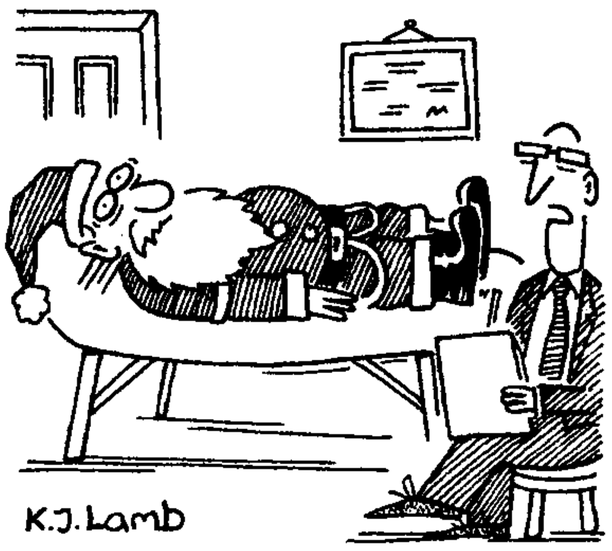
(The congregation will then process out of the church to the place of execution)

Onanugu: Happy Christmas to you all!

TURKEY STRIKE

*"You're right, he **has** gone"*

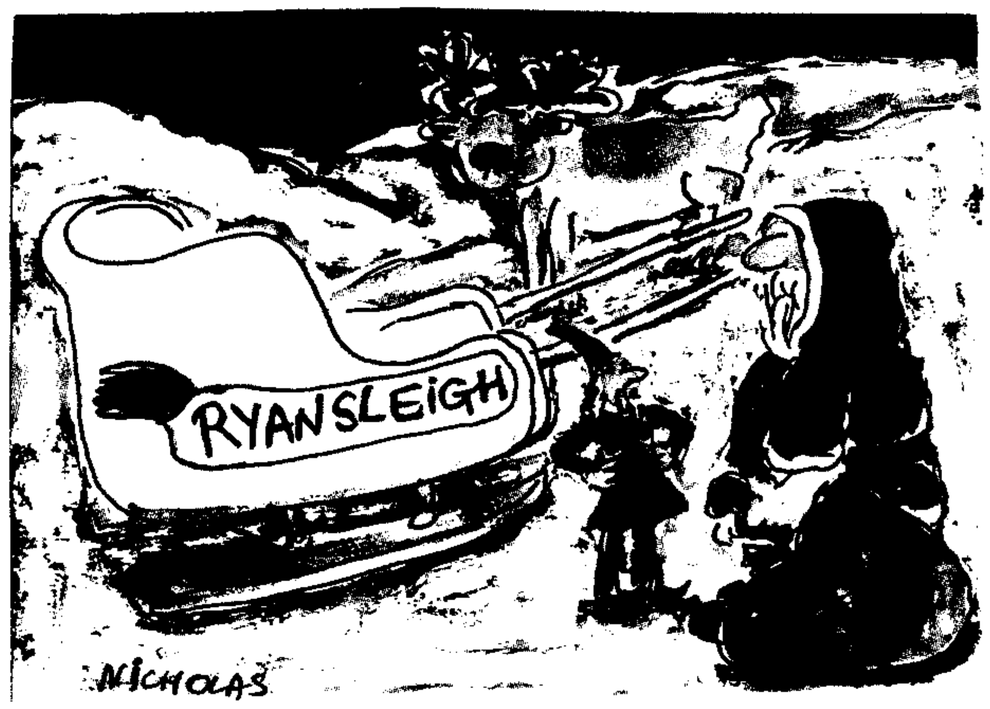
CLIMATE CHANGE PROTESTORS



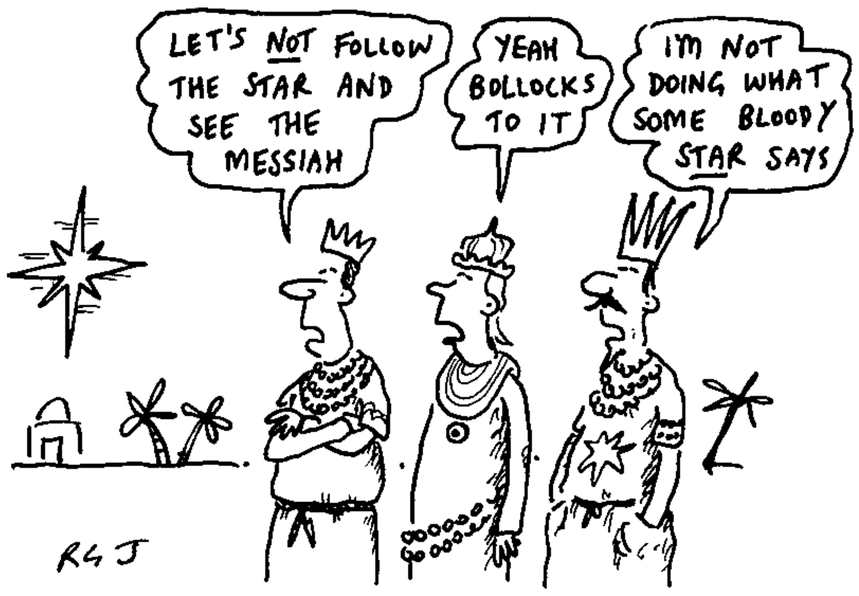
"These feelings of elf-loathing – are they affecting your work?"

"So let's see what you got – a belt from us. A belt from Uncle Peter. From Auntie Claire – a belt. And a belt from..."

"My doll's house, Grandad. Is that where the duck used to live?"

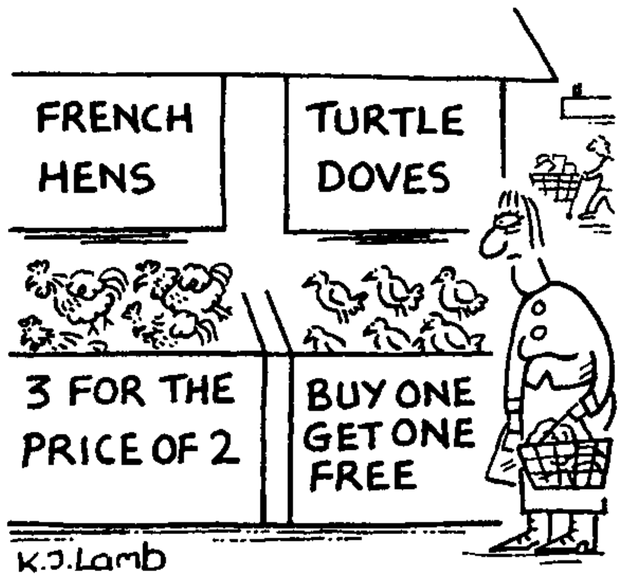


"Sack of toys – that's an extra thirty five quid"



Three Contrariwise Men

"...and you haven't seen these 200 people since last Christmas?"



DIARY

HAROLD PINTER'S CHRISTMAS NUMBER ONES

Two Little Boys

Two Little Boys had two little toys
Each had a wooden horse
Gaily they played each summer's day
Warriors, both, of course.
One little chap then had a mishap
Broke off his horse's head
The other little chap said, "You've fucked
Your horse's head good and proper now
Haven't you chum? And don't come whining to me,
Chum, when you get it up the arse if you go into
Battle on a horse that's lost its fucking head."

Mistletoe and Wine

The child is a king, the carollers sing
The old has passed, there's a new beginning
Dreams of Santa, dreams of snow
Fingers numb, faces aglow.
Christmas time, mistletoe and wine
If that's all you want, well, fine
But the Americans are planning
To blow the shit back up your ass and out
Your fucking ears. So much for your
Fucking dreams of Santa now, chum!

White Christmas

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know
Where the treetops glisten,
And children listen
To hear sleigh bells in the snow

But that's not what they fucking hear
Is it? Not fucking likely. What they fucking
Hear isn't sleigh bells, chum:
No, it's the sound of Mr Tony
Fucking Blair and his Nazi stormtroopers
Preparing to blow your balls into
Kingdom Fucking Come,
Chum.

Grandad

I've been sitting here all day, thinking
Same old dream ten years away, thinking
Now my days are gone, memories linger on
Thoughts of when I was a boy

Penny farthings on the street, riding
Motorcars were funny things, frightening
Bow and hoops and spinning tops
Penny Dreadfuls, lollipops
Comic cuts, all different things

Grandad, grandad, you're lovely
That's what we all think of you
Or rather that's what we might think
If you hadn't clogged the gutters
With corpses blown to smithereens
By your great big fucking prick, grandad.
So why don't you go shove your penny-farthing
Up your great fat fucking arse.
Not so lovely now, are you
Grandad?

Happy Christmas (War Is Over)

And so this is Christmas
I hope you have fun
The near and the dear ones
The old and the young

A very merry Christmas
And a happy New Year
Let's hope it's a good one
Without any fear

And so this is
Christmas
And what have you done?
I'll tell you what you've done
You've fucked it up good and proper
That's what you've fucking done.

There's No-one Quite Like Grandma

There's no one quite like Grandma
And I know you will agree
That she always is a friend to you
And she's a friend to me

There's no one quite like Grandma
She's there in times of need
Before it's bedtime, on her knee
To us a book she'll read

Grandma, we love you
Grandma, we do
Though you may be far away
We think of you

And one day when we are older
We'll look back and say
The reason there was no one quite like Grandma
Was that she shot heat-seeking missiles
Out of missile base in her fucking ass
And left headless corpses scattered
With blood gushing out of their fucking necks
Which isn't what I'd call lovely. Would you,
chum?

Wombling Merry Christmas

Open your eyes, look to the skies when you're
lonely,
There will be stars shining for you.
Sleepers awake, it's getting late, snow is falling.
The whole wide world is wombling too.

All day long we will be wombling in the snow,
We wish you a Wombling Merry Christmas.
All day long we will be laughing as we go.
We wish you a Wombling Merry Christmas.

All day long we'll Womble the Wombling shit out
of you
So that your little Wombling head will spin off and
Wombling Blood will gush from your Wombling
neck
And you'll Womble into a mass Womble grave,
The tomb of the Unknown Womble.
And a Wombling Merry Christmas to you, too,
chum.

Mull of Kintyre

Far have I travelled and much have I seen
Dark distant mountains with valleys of green
Past painted deserts the sunsets on fire
Because they're bombing the fucking blazes
Out of Mull of Kintyre.

Can We Fix It?

Bob the Builder
(Can we fix it?)
Bob the Builder
(Yes we can!)

Bob and the gang
have so much fun
Working together
They get the job done!

Bob the Builder
(Can we fix it?)
Bob the Builder
(Yes we can!)
Bob the Builder
(Can we fix it?)
Bob the Builder
(Yes we can!)

Time to get busy
Such a lot to do
Before Bob the Builder
Fucks the shit out of you

'Cos he's in the pocket of Uncle Sam
And he'll sodomise you up the ass
Until you're so fucking sore
You're screaming like hell

Bob the Builder
(Can we fix it?)
Bob the Builder
(No we fucking can't
You're well and truly fucked)

The Snowman

We're walking in the air,
We're floating in the moonlit sky;
Because the Yanks have just
Bombed the fucking shit out of us.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

AS A ROCK STAR I'VE HAD A MASSIVE IMPACT ON THIS WORLD, BARRY...
'COURSE YOU HAVE, GARY...
I MEAN BIG... HIC AND I'LL TELL YOU HOW BIG...
I'M TALKING BIGGER THAN BONO... BIGGER THAN STING... BIGGER THAN LOADS OF THEM...
DAD BOASTING ABOUT RECORD SALES?
NO. HIS CARBON FOOTPRINT
I ONCE HAD A PAIR OF SOCKS FLOWN BY PERSONAL JET FROM L.A. TO SYDNEY!

Literary Review

BOOKS OF THE YEAR
2009 Log Rolling Awards

MOST BRAZEN PUFF

"*Lustrum* by Robert Harris is wonderful, stimulating reading, and hard to put down. You will not need to be a political animal to enjoy his vivid reconstruction of life at the top in ancient Rome." – **Peter Mandelson,** *New Statesman* – a close friend of Harris and the novel's dedicatee.

Runner-up

"By an alarming coincidence, three people I know and like (and admire enormously) have published novels this year… Henry Porter… Sebastian Faulks… Robert Harris." – **Roger Alton**, *New Statesman.*

Bronze

"The obvious book of the year is *Stanley I Presume* by my father Stanley Johnson. It is a rip-roaring read…" – **Boris Johnson**, *Daily Telegraph.*

Highly commended

"My neighbour Charles Foster's *The Selfish Gene…*" – **Andrew Billen**, *New Statesman.*

"Nothing pleased and fascinated me more than *Americans in Paris* by Charles Glass. I should declare an interest, since Charlie is a friend…" – **Allan Massie**, *Spectator.*

LIFETIME AWARD FOR SERIAL PUFFING OF PALS

Craig Raine*, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, who this year puffed his former student Adam Foulds, and William Boyd – the latter very likely a thank-you note for the novelist's recommendation of a subscription to Raine's magazine *Arete* ("I can't live without it") in last year's *Sunday Telegraph* Books of the Year. [* *See HUMBUG OF THE YEAR over*]

Highly commended

The touching regard in which A.S. Byatt is held by younger novelists continued to amuse the judges, with **Philip Hensher** in the *Spectator* commending *The Children's Book* ("possibly the best thing she's ever done") with the same fervour as **Laurence Norfolk** in the *TLS* ("My favourite book… for its scope, its narrative energy and its sensitivity to the strangeness of familiar-seeming things.") It can only be coincidence that Byatt's earlier novel *The Biographer's Tale*, is dedicated to "Philip and Laurence, who insisted".

BEST TWEEDY LOG-ROLL

The long-term love-in between **D.J. Taylor** and **Allan Massie** continues, with Taylor puffing Massie's *Surviving* in the *Spectator* ("thoroughly neurotic… wonderfully reminiscent of Francis King's early novels") only to find Massie returning the compliment for Taylor's novel *Ask Alice* in the *Scotsman* a fortnight later.

BEST IRISH LOG-ROLL

"Fintan O'Toole's *Ship of Fools: How Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger…* is an essential book for anyone who wants the facts and the background to refute the idea that what happened to the Irish economy was a sad accident." – **Colm Toibin**, *Irish Times.*

"Colm Toibin's Brooklyn is a small masterpiece of resonant understatement… a luminous exploration of the central human experience of exile." – **Fintan O'Toole**, *Irish Times.*

BEST WELSH LOG-ROLL

"Of the year's many autobiographies, the best by far was Byron Rogers's eccentric, melancholy *Me.* Byron almost makes me proud to be Welsh, which is saying something." – **Roger Lewis**, *Spectator.* (A month earlier in the same magazine, **Rogers** praised Lewis's *Seasonal Suicide Notes* as "one of the strangest books you will ever read. It is also the funniest. And the most reckless.")

MOST IRISH AUTHORS PICKED BY IRISH AUTHOR

Winner

Colum McCann, *Irish Times*, with six (John Banville, Jennifer Johnston, Mary Beth Keane, Peter Murphy, Trevor Byrne, Christine Dwyer Hickey.)

Highly commended

Seamus Heaney, *TLS* (Beckett, Banville, Durcan), and **Paul Muldoon**, *TLS* (Beckett, Enda Walsh, Toibin), both three.

ANDREW MOTION AWARD FOR MOST FABER BOOKS PICKED BY FABER AUTHOR

David Peace, *Guardian*, with three (Andy Beckett, Kevin Cummins, Gordon Burn).

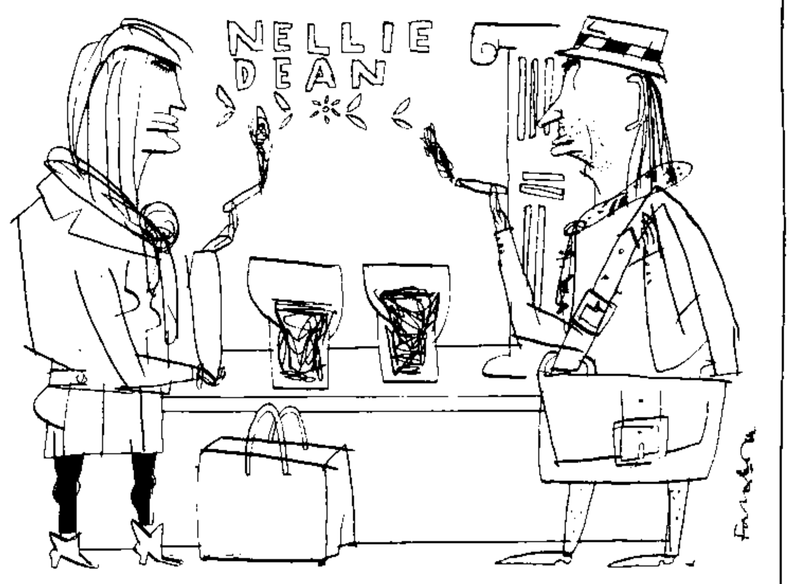
BEST PLUG FOR OWN EDITOR

Carol Ann Duffy, *Guardian*, choosing *Rain* by Don Paterson (Duffy is published by Picador, where Paterson is poetry editor.)

DEFTEST PLUG FOR OWN PUBLISHER

"I thought I knew everything I needed or wanted to know about Sarah Palin, but *Going Rouge* (OR Books), a collection of essays about the former vice-presidential nominee, turned out to be enormously entertaining and instructive." – **Zoe Heller**, *Guardian.* (Heller is friendly with one of OR Books' founders, and due to contribute to an essay collection next year.)

Scenes You Seldom See



"My life has been incredibly interesting, but I have never had the faintest urge to write a book about it"

BEST LUVVIE PLUG

"Josephine Hart's *The Truth About Love* is a devastating account of grief and loss and the truth and lies that bind us to our family and our country. Her language is beautiful, her characters rich and funny… like all great works of art, one is aware how much it cost her to write it." – **Dominic West**, *Observer.* (Actor West has taken part in Hart's poetry evenings and is on her audiotape, *Words That Burn.*)

OUTSTANDING PUFF FOR NEIGHBOUR

"*The Secret History of Georgian London: How the Wages of Sin Shaped the Capital*, by Dan Cruickshank. *Belle de Jour* for the 18th century. Funny, fantastical, full of impossible facts and scandalous stories. Scholarly, but also the ideal stocking (and suspender) filler." – **Jeanette Winterson**, *Guardian.* (In a recent *Times* article celebrating Spitalfields, east London, Winterson described how Cruickshank helped her find a house there.)

BEST EXEMPLAR OF TRANSATLANTIC SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

"Ian Jack's *The Country Formerly Known As Great Britain* [is a] wonderful collection of memoirs, essays, investigative articles, novelties, anecdotes, family mini-sagas, and a sweet trifle or two… Jack is a superb and diverse writer… He's smart, proportionate, discerning and (rarest of rarities) decent. To me, this book is indispensable." – **Richard Ford**, *Guardian.* (Jack is a former editor of *Granta*; Ford edited *The Granta Book of the American Short Story, The New Granta Book of the American Short Story*, and *The Granta Book of the American Long Story*)

BEST ESPRIT DE CORPS AWARD

London Review of Books contributing editor **John Lanchester** went for two *LRB* regulars, Colm Toibin and Hilary Mantel, out of his three *Guardian* selections, and also picked them in the *Telegraph*; **Toibin** himself plumped for *The Eitingons* by the *LRB*'s editor, Mary-Kay Wilmers, in the *Guardian*; but **Andrew O'Hagan**'s dazzling display of multi-organ puffery sealed the team award [*See LOG ROLLER OF THE YEAR over*].

Runner-up

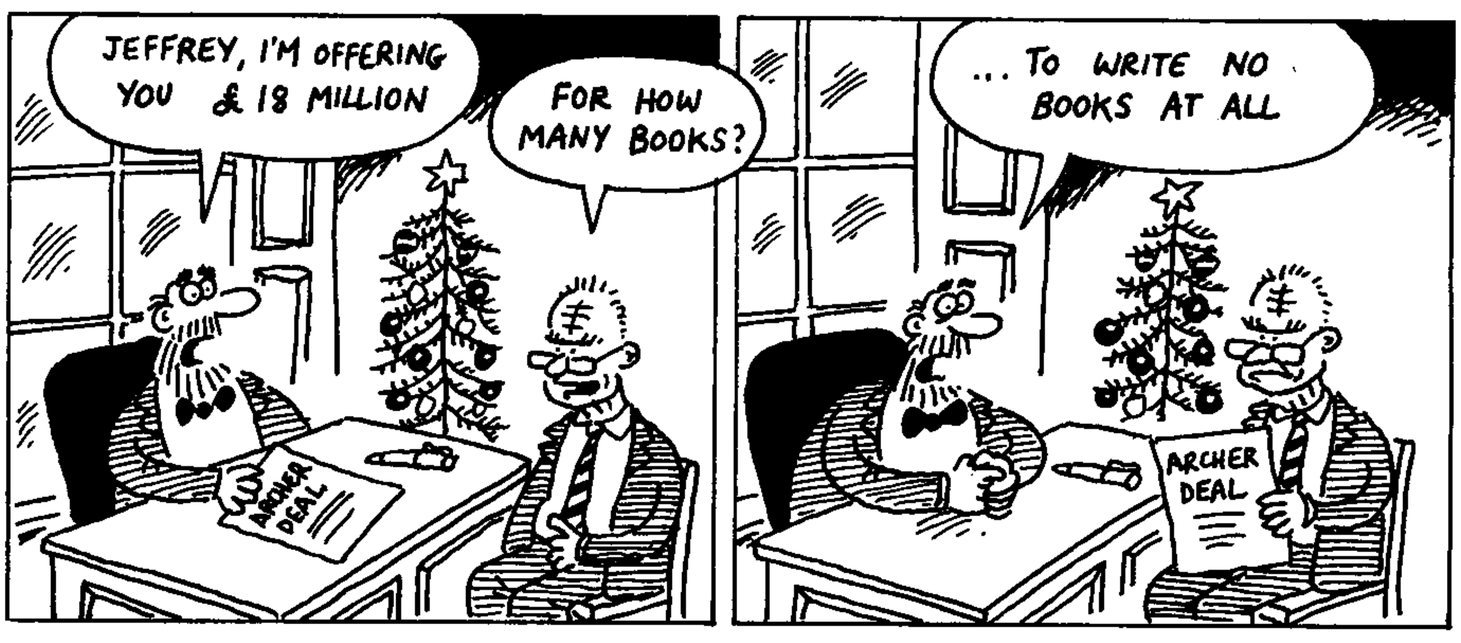
Spectator old boy **Ferdinand Mount** found only books by chaps associated with the weekly – Andrew Brown, Frank Johnson – of interest in his choices for it; and a solid all-round team effort saw plenty of *Speccie* selectors picking books by *Speccie* stalwarts such as Selina Hastings

WOMEN BEWARE WOMEN AWARD

In choosing JM Coetzee's *Summertime* in the *Sunday Telegraph*, the Booker judges **Lucasta Miller** and **Sue Perkins** indicated they were the minority who voted against Hilary Mantel's winner *Wolf Hall*; in the same paper, their colleagues James Naughtie and Michael Prodger picked Mantel, and the other male judge, John Mullan, must also have voted for her.

CLIVE JAMES MEMORIAL SHOW-OFF AWARD FOR SELECTING OBSCURE, HARD-TO-OBTAIN FOREIGN BOOKS

"The [16th-century] Danish artist Melchior Lorck… was an admirer of Durer but with a stronger tendency



to fancy and drollery... He has only remained so little known because, while the catalogue raisonné was being compiled, almost nothing of his work was published. *Melchior Lorck*, fully illustrated in four volumes with a fifth to come, has at last appeared, the splendid creation of Erik Fischer (with Ernst Jonas Bencard and Mikael Bogh Rasmussen and Marco Iuliano), published by the Royal Library of Copenhagen." – **Marina Warner**, *TLS*.

Runner-up

"Emmanuel Carrere published a memoir of ultimate seriousness, *D'autres vies que la mienne* (POL, 19.50 euros), recording the life, and death from cancer, of his sister-in-law, among other bereavements; no less touching was Roland Barthes's *Journal de deuil* (Seuil, 18.90 euros), private, heartfelt notations of the sense of absolute loss he suffered after the death of his mother in 1977." – **David Sexton**, *Evening Standard*.

QUIETLY LOG-ROLLS THE DON

"Rana Mitter's *Modern China: A Very Short Introduction* [is] a brilliant essay in synthesis... Mitter provocatively concludes that today's China is the fulfilment of Chiang Kai-shek's dream." – **Timothy Garton Ash**, *TLS*. (Garton Ash and Mitter are both Oxford professors, and sit on the same committee as part of the university's Civil Disobedience project. Garton Ash's other *TLS* selections were fellow *Guardian* columnist Martin Jacques and fellow Atlantic author Kenan Malik).

ANTI-LOG ROLLING AWARD

In which a famous author quietly rebukes another by indirect means. This year's winner is **Julian Barnes**, whose *TLS* vote for the late John Updike's *My Father's Tears* and *Endpoint* included some withering remarks about "several reviews of impudent stupidity" which the books had received. The judges decided that this was Julian having another little dig at his erstwhile friend Martin Amis, who wrote a notably critical piece for the *Guardian*.

LEAST INTEREST IN BOOKS NOT PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN

"I was asked to contribute a foreword to *A Renewable World* by Herbert Girardet and Miguel Mendonca and was delighted to do so..." – **Bianca Jagger**'s sole choice, *New Statesman*.

LOG ROLLER OF THE YEAR

The Eitingons (Faber) by Mary-Kay Wilmers is "my prose book of the year without a doubt... completely riveting", proclaimed **Andrew O'Hagan**, Faber author and *LRB* contributing editor, in the *Guardian*. He went on – perhaps hoping all these judgements will appear as "praise" from the relevant organs on the paperback jacket – to hymn the virtues of the *LRB* editor's debut in the *New Statesman* ("wonderfully stylish writing... really gripping... a small masterpiece"), *Daily Telegraph* ("worth the wait... the non-fiction book of the year") and the *Scotsman* too ("fantastic stories... stylish and original writing... driven – beautifully, I feel, by one person's sensibility"). Alas, no where did he mention that Ms Wilmers happens to run the *London Review of Books*, whose contributing editor he is.

PS: Humbug of the Year Award

While the *TLS* was quick to point out the conflict of interest between O'Hagan and Wilmers at the *LRB*, it did not find space to point out a conflict in its own annual log-rolling love-in. For in the *TLS* **Craig Raine** had puffed a proof copy of *Defending the Guilty: Truth and Lies in the Criminal Courtroom* by Alex McBride, to be published by Viking/Penguin next April, as "Expert, authoritative, hilarious – an insider's fearless account of life at the criminal bar. Look out for it." What he didn't say, and the *TLS* didn't point out, is that he happens to be the father of Nina Raine, who receives a rapturous acknowledgement in the book for her role as, er, the author's girlfriend. "I want to thank Nina Raine, who supplied brilliant ideas and loving support. I can't begin to say how much it meant," writes McBride. Dad must have been beaming!

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

"[AN] abysmal book... When these pages are not dismally boring they are positively alarming." Thus Christopher Hitchens reviewing Sarah Palin's *Going Rogue* in the *Sunday Times*.

And which British newspaper was it that inflicted on its readers hefty extracts from this execrable tome – a serialisation that was in no way related to the fact that the paper has the same parent company as the alarming Alaskan's publisher, HarperCollins? Step forward... the *Sunday Times*.

HER POEMS "overflow with likable qualities: exuberance, candour, brightness – of both spirit and intelligence – and curiosity," purrs Christopher Reid on the front of *Restricted View*, the just-published debut collection of Olivia Cole, an Oxford-educated *Evening Standard* journalist who is still in her twenties.

On the jacket flap Clive James (who has welcomed her as one of the "guest poets" on his website) characteristically enthuses at greater length, ending by praising "the combination of a buttonholing personal voice and a curious engagement with a wider world [that] gives her poetry an unusually rich play of tone, a reportorial lyricism that many older poets would find it hard to match".

The offerings inside scarcely suggest a new Carol Ann Duffy or Alice Oswald, so what can have got these 60-plus literary gents so excited? A strong clue is the book's cover, which offers a restricted view (geddit?) of a nude drawing of the author, whose charms are happily not significantly obscured by lettering – a ploy known in the book world as "doing an Amanda Foreman", after the debutante historian who set out her scholarly credentials by taking her clothes off for the *Tatler*. Ingenuously thanked in Cole's acknowledgments for "continuing wise mentoring" since 2003, Reid has the reward of seeing his surname superimposed on the nubile poetess's bottom.

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

COUNTRY singer Dolly Parton's visit to South Yorkshire to launch a reading scheme in Rotherham made headlines in 2007 even though the event was marred somewhat by a row over a council meeting being postponed so that the bigwigs could hobnob with the celebrity. But how are things going at Rotherham's Dolly Parton Imagination Library, which offers under-5s one free book a month?

To date the scheme has cost £277,000. It was envisaged that this would be met by donations from individuals and community groups and Rotherham council even invited staff to have regular deductions taken from their wages. But donations have stopped at £1,880 and only 20 employees signed-up to have their pay docked.

Thus the vast bulk of the cost has been met by Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber of Commerce and from the Local Authority Business Growth Incentives pot. Locals want to know why public money is being spent on Dolly's project when free books were already available from the town's libraries – a service that could be severely restricted when the cash-strapped council sets its budget in the new year.

Still, none of that stopped Rotherham council leader Roger Stone from enjoying a trip to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, earlier this year to "provide inspiring remarks about the replication of the Imagination Library in the UK".

"Am I in Leeds, Bristol or Milton Keynes?

Another subtle detail are [sic] *the small channels in the centre stack fascia that link the main infotainment and climate controls. They resemble the shape of Leonard da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, a hint at the combination of human design and scientific precision deployed in the layout of the cabin.*

Press release advertising the new Saab 9-5 saloon

In my honours year at university I'd become massively excited about the idea of the performativity of selfhood, particularly with respect to gender.

I am always inspired by works which meditate self-reflexively on their own form in a way that is generous and full.

ELEANOR CATTON,
Guardian Saturday Review

Pseuds Corner

You're never quite sure if the section of the book you're reading is the authentic book or not. Nothing is authentic, and yet everything is authentic. So I think my work comes into that category...But just the struggle to tell a story in an authentic fashion is already authentic...and yet it's not.

STING,
Classical TV website

Listening and the temporality of documentary ventriloquism

I will be exploring the time of telling in relation to the time of the told in film and the disjunct thereby arising, producing a temporality of listening that is a certain fiction, notwithstanding the indexicality – the documentary truth of the recorded spoken [*continues*].

Lecture given by PROFESSOR ELIZABETH COWIE at the University of Leeds

He is acting incarnate, not so much a performer as a lightning conductor for drama.

SARAH SANDS on Ben Wishaw,
Independent on Sunday

CONTRIBUTORS: Toby Paterson, Anna Derbyshire, Chris Knight, Paul Middleton, Hazel Dawe.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

VOLUNTARY WORK

Rotten to the Corps

THE Experience Corps (TEC), a pisspoor plan to rope over-50s into more voluntary roles, was a £20m flop for the Home Office when it missed its targets by a mile in 2004. But it hasn't been such a flop for the bosses of the company set up to run it.

TEC is still around, with the same three directors who launched it, but it has now morphed into "a consultancy company providing bespoke solutions to business". The company's last filed returns show a £331,000 turnover in 2008. The most recent full accounts available are a year older, but they show directors' remuneration of more than £89,000.

The Experience Corps received £19.9m from the Home Office over three years, with a target to recruit 250,000 new volunteers over 50. However, by December 2003, it had only recruited 153,000. "Sometimes we ought to ask the government whether they could not have acted more efficiently," noted MP Andrew Turner during a debate on the Charities Bill in 2006.

Two of TEC's three directors have featured in the *Eye* several times before. Brian Basham was Fayed's PR man and a PR consultant to British Airways during the "dirty tricks" campaign against Richard Branson and Virgin, while Maggie Semple was a director of the New Millennium Experience Company and was responsible for the dismal "learning zone" in the Dome. The third director, Anne Watts, is a bigwig at the NHS appointments commission.

The company boasts of its database of 47,000 people over the age of 50, which it uses for "market research", or as it puts it: "We draw on the expertise of this Experience Generation to help provide solutions for businesses that seek to improve their competitive edge." Questions the database members have been asked include whether they have "started a detox" or "voted on a reality TV show". Hardly the charitable volunteering that TEC's database of over-50s was originally compiled for.

Tucked away in written parliamentary questions in 2007, MP Greg Clark raised the issue of whether TEC had ever paid back any fees in respect of "assets accumulated during or as a result of its period of grant funding". Minister Phil Hope said it had not.

So does any of this bother the government that spent £20m on setting up this consultancy? Apparently not. TEC's recent customers include the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform department.

DIAL-A-RIDE

Cross lines

DISABLED people who rely on Transport for London's Dial-a-Ride service are being badly let down as calls for a ride go unanswered and hundreds of journeys are refused.

A written answer from mayor's question time last month showed that on average more than 200 calls a day go unanswered. On 23 October, for instance, 403 people eventually gave up and hung up the phone, and no wonder: the average waiting time before someone answered was often more than three minutes.

Even when callers did get through, however, there was no guarantee clients would get to where they want to go. The 2007 Transport Plan promised that a new computerised and centralised booking system would halve the 99,000 "refused" trips a year (ie. journeys the service couldn't provide). In fact under the new system refusals have risen by 50 percent.

Liberal Democrat London Assembly transport spokeswoman Caroline Pidgeon has discovered that one in 10 journeys, or 400 journeys a day, are refused. For many people, such as those with wheelchairs that can't fit into cabs, Dial-a-Ride is the only option, so a refusal means they simply can't travel to where they need to go – whether it's the shops, a doctor's appointment or a social event. But woe betide anyone who tries to complain about the shoddy service. In October users were given a new set of contact numbers, including one to call if they were experiencing problems with the service. Several weeks later, the number still didn't work.

Dial-a-Ride user Michael Lloyd, who is heading a campaign for improvements to the scheme, says it's a vital lifeline for vulnerable people and the present service just isn't good enough. However, things are likely to get worse because, along with cycling, Dial-a-Ride comes under the heading "other surface transport" which is facing £1.1bn "efficiency savings" as mayor Boris Johnson tries to shave £5bn off the cost of London transport.

● Council-run dial-a-ride services in **Nottingham** and **Epsom** were told they face the axe this month due to budget cuts. Similar transport lifelines run by charities in **Swindon** and **Wyre Forest** are also under threat after losing their grant funding.

HEATING SCHEME

Money to burn

ALISTAIR DARLING'S pre-budget report included an extra £200m for Warm Front, the scheme to subsidise home heating improvements that left pensioners shivering last winter.

Lack of funds was never the problem for Warm Front, however. The scheme left vulnerable people facing long, cold delays because Eaga plc, the company with a monopoly on running the scheme, didn't have enough engineers to do the work (*Eyes passim*). Warm Front funds were only available through Eaga, even if local tradespeople could do the work more promptly (and indeed, much more cheaply). In August, the public accounts committee slammed the scheme as poorly targeted, as many households that got help were not in fuel poverty while many that were severely fuel-poor were excluded by the grant criteria.

So how is that waiting list now? No one knows. On 1 December, Lib Dem MP Andrew Stunell asked for the average waiting time for completion of heating improvements carried out under Warm Front. He was told the data was "not readily available". Junior climate change minister David Kidney promised to supply a spreadsheet once the information was extrapolated by Eaga.

Labour MP John Mann said that in November one of his constituents had been charged £4,500 to put in one boiler and two radiators. "I can get tradesmen and tradeswomen to do that for £900 or £1,000," he said. "My constituents are expected to pay £1,000 of that £4,500. We will ensure that they do not, but the taxpayer is still paying £3,500 for that simple little job."

MoD DEATH

Fatal delays

THE long-awaited inquest into the death of Terry Jupp (pictured), a Ministry of Defence scientist who suffered fatal burns when an explosives test went horribly wrong in 2002, has been delayed yet again.

In answer to a parliamentary question from the Lib Dem MP Norman Baker, justice secretary Jack Straw this month appeared to blame Dr Peter Dean, the Southend and South East Essex coroner, saying inquest dates and adjournments were "solely" matters for him in his role as an "independent judicial office holder". But this ignores the fact that Dr Dean has had to keep postponing the inquest because of difficulties in obtaining evidence and information from the MoD.

Because of the sensitive nature of the work Mr Jupp and colleagues carried out at the then Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) at Shoeburyness, much of the documentation and other material in the case is being redacted or in other ways protected from public scrutiny.

Dr Dean had set aside dates in January, May and October this year for a hearing which was expected to last a month. All the dates came and went. Now he hopes the inquest can finally go ahead next May in front a jury – nearly eight years after Mr Jupp's death. Given how memories fade and that witnesses have moved on, not to mention the secrecy surrounding Mr Jupp's work and death and the distress caused to his family, this is far from ideal.

Private Eye first wrote about Mr Jupp's death in 2005, when we learned that in the first case of its kind, two of 46-year-old Mr Jupp's seniors were to stand trial charged with his manslaughter because of gross negligence at DSTL. The *Eye* had been told that there had long been concern among staff about inadequate health and safety at the site, but it was only after Mr Jupp's death that safety issues took on a "very high priority".

The delay in holding an inquest was partly due to the need to deal with criminal matters first. But the case against one of the scientists, Robert Weighhill, was thrown out by a judge in 2005 because of lack of evidence. Two years later, following a review by senior prosecutors, including the then attorney-general Lord Goldsmith - the case against Dr Maurice Marshall, an explosives expert with an international reputation, was formally dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service. The court heard that new evidence had come to light, but because of the sensitivity of the case no detail could be given in open court.

There was speculation at the time that defence chiefs here and in the United States were worried that highly sensitive material about the nature of the work at Shoeburyness might become public. It is now known that Mr Jupp and the team were working on a joint project with the US experimenting with the volatile properties of home-made bombs which could be used by terrorists. On 14 August 2002 Mr Jupp, a father of two, was engulfed in flames when a mix exploded prematurely and he died of septicaemia six days later in hospital.

How much information the coroner and Mr Jupp's family can extract from the MoD about what went wrong at Shoeburyness remains to be seen. But there would appear to be no reason why issues of health and safety at the site cannot be openly explored, even if the exact nature of the testing has to remain secret. It is anticipated that Dr Marshall and Mr Weighhill will give evidence.

In the Back continues overleaf ➤

TRIALS ABROAD

Europe's arrested development warrant

ANDREW SYMEOU, the student extradited in July to stand trial over a death at a Greek nightclub, is submitting an application to the European Court of Human Rights over the Greek authorities' continuing failure to grant him bail.

Ever since he was controversially sent back to Greece under a European arrest warrant (EAW), without any consideration of whether there was credible evidence against him, he has been held in Greek jails. Even though he was not a fugitive, had never been in trouble before, had been on bail without incident in the UK, had Greek relatives with whom he could stay in Athens and had offered to surrender his passport, his bail application was refused by the Greek courts. Neither he nor his lawyers were present or able to make representations on his behalf.

Thus Greek magistrates accepted as fact the prosecution case and declared – before any trial – that there was "sufficient proof" that Andrew "committed the indictable act of manslaughter" – a decision his lawyers will argue ignores the presumption of innocence and breaches his rights to liberty and a fair hearing.

Andrew is accused of punching Jonathan Hiles, an 18-year-old also on holiday in the Greek island of Zakynthos, with such force that he fell off a nightclub stage and suffered fatal head injuries. Andrew says he has never struck anyone in his life, had never met Mr Hiles and arrived at the club long after the incident.

The case was seen as a test of the EAW as it was argued that Andrew could not get a fair trial in Greece because of the "bad faith" of the Greek police. Evidence in the case, seen by the *Eye*, suggests that some of it was fabricated or obtained by violent intimidation of witnesses.

Andrew's case has been taken up by the campaign group Fair Trials International (FTI), which says that basic lack of minimum safeguards surrounding EAWs are leading to widespread injustice. It has found that people have been sent to the other side of Europe for petty offences; that warrants have been issued many years after offences; that even when extradition is refused the warrant remains in force, leaving the "suspect" at risk of arrest should they ever travel in Europe; that people have been sent to serve sentences abroad even when it is accepted they were subject to an unfair trial; and that some, like Andrew, face months or years in a foreign jail awaiting trial.

They include Deborah Dark, now a grandmother, who is effectively a prisoner in her own country, unable to leave the UK because the French authorities are demanding she serve a prison sentence for a 20-year-old drug conviction that took place in her absence and about which she knew nothing. Recent court rulings in the UK and Spain, where she has twice been arrested under the EAW scheme, have both said it would be unjust to extradite her, but the French refuse to give up.

Mrs Dark had originally been arrested in France in 1989 on suspicion of possession of a large quantity of cannabis and held for eight months awaiting trial. She was eventually cleared of all charges and released back to the UK. But, unknown to her or her lawyers, the prosecution appealed and, during a hearing in her absence in 1990, the French court of appeal overturned the verdict and sentenced her to six years in jail. She only found out when she was arrested in 2007 in Turkey. She was arrested again in 2008 in Spain.

FTI says her rights to free movement within Europe are being violated by conviction in an unfair trial that took place in her absence, and it has called on France to withdraw the warrant.

Another victim of the system is Gary Mann, a Kent fireman who in less than 48 hours was arrested, tried and convicted of taking part in football riots in Portugal in 2004. He denies being one of the rioters but had been unable either to instruct a lawyer or to understand the fast-track court system put in place to combat hooliganism, which convicted him and sentenced him to two years in jail. But he says he was told he would not serve the sentence if he accepted immediate deportation back to the UK.

The following year, he won a court ruling in the UK that the proceedings in Portugal had been unfair, when attempts to make him subject to a worldwide football banning order were thrown out by a judge. That, he thought, was an end of the matter – until March this year when British police arrested him at his home on an EAW issued by Portuguese authorities in 2008. They say they now want him to serve the two-year sentence. His lawyers are still fighting the extradition, saying he has no right of appeal in Portugal and the trial has already been declared a travesty.

FTI is gathering support from other European countries for the introduction of basic minimum legal safeguards which have to be met before a suspect can be extradited under an EAW. They include ensuring that the procedures leading to the execution of warrants are not unfair, illegal or the result of misconduct and that the execution of the warrant will not result in a breach of human rights.

No one disputes that there needs to be a simple and speedy system in place that ensures that people cannot escape justice by jumping European borders, but the present system is resulting in significant injustice.

IT CONTRACTS

Supremely stupid

WHEN the new supreme court launched in October it needed an efficient IT system to handle its documentation. Although it is the highest court in the land, it does not yet have a high caseload, so any decent system already in use in the courts service should have sufficed.

Nevertheless it has ended up with something that is no better than the numerous existing court IT systems having paid nearly £1m more than it should have done. How did this happen?

The Ministry of Justice first turned to the *Eye*'s old chums at Logica (*Eyes passim*), whose procurement procedure seems to have been deeply flawed. It sent out invitations to tender in 2008 and four companies were initially in the running. Two small operators, Design Systems and Visionhall, had either already built case management systems, or pilots for such systems using relatively inexpensive software. The other two were major document management businesses, Open Text and Objective.

Logica brushed off the smaller, cheaper companies without even asking for pricing. When one of them tried to offer a quote, Logica said it had forgotten the firm had even tendered and it was now too late. Objective then dropped out when Logica changed the tender specifications to include a large helping of case management, leaving Open Text as the only horse in the race. Open Text has never built a system like this for any UK court and nor is it even the government's preferred document management firm.

Logica then set about assembling a new case and document management system for the court almost from scratch. It didn't seem to think that any of the 30-odd management systems already floating about in the justice system were up to the job (at least one of which had been built by the company Logica had "forgotten" about).

Both the rebuffed smaller companies say they could have provided a system for around £200,000 – yet the government has paid at least £910,000 to reinvent the wheel. It is unclear from FoI documents whether this sum includes the 10 percent procurement fee Logica charges the government for acquiring such systems. Either way, the supreme court's new system is seen by IT insiders as a waste of time and money. Any of the bidding companies' existing systems might have done just as well.

So why did Logica go with the most expensive option, without getting prices for comparison? Surely not because the Open Text solution needed months of consultancy to make it fit the brief and, having a 10 percent buying fee in place, it pays Logica to buy the most expensive project it can?

TAX DODGING

Mind the gap

"SYSTEM flaws cost £40bn a year in uncollected tax, says official report", ran the *FT* front page last week, highlighting the greatest hidden contribution to Britain's budget deficit: the billions lost in tax avoidance and evasion.

The figure – more than the entire education budget – only emerged after an elaborate charade played out by HM Revenue & Customs over four and a half years on two separate freedom of information requests from the *Eye,* in an effort to cover up the "tax gap". In both cases HMRC refused to release the information, only to be told to do so by the Information Commissioner.

HMRC then appealed to the information tribunal, which set up hearings for which lawyers prepared their arguments at great public expense. Then, in both cases, HMRC withdrew its appeal within three days of the hearings, never having intended to defend its cover-ups but enabling it to slip out the figures alongside other financial news and some tough-sounding initiatives.

Among the largest losses is tax avoidance by "very large business" costing £3.1bn (and that's after tax inspectors have clawed back a further £3bn through legal challenges). But even this, in HMRC's words, is "liable to be underestimated" since it covers just the dodging that HMRC spots. Against which chancellor Alistair Darling's measures last week to recover, ahem, £160m, look pretty paltry.

Despite plenty of hot air, a degree of tax avoidance by big business remains officially tolerated. Papers that HMRC was forced to release to the *Eye* included an official missive to Darling in February 2008 warning against "any perception of a heavy handed crackdown on avoidance". This is a reference to a general rule striking out all tax avoidance of the sort deployed in other countries but seen as business-unfriendly here.

Coincidentally – or not – the day after Darling's pre-Budget report, parliament's public accounts committee called on the treasury to consider just such a rule and noted with some incredulity that HMRC doesn't know how many staff it has tackling tax avoidance or how much it spends on the task. It also reported that HMRC "acknowledges that it needs more capability to deal with the increase in evasion, avoidance and business failure that the economic downturn is likely to bring". But what is it doing instead? Yep, cutting 25,000 staff to save a few million while the billions in dodged tax slip quietly down the drain.

The report – happily for the authorities little noticed amid the PBR coverage - also recorded that £11bn of outstanding tax bills might not be collected largely because of "outdated" IT systems, despite the billions chucked at IT suppliers EDS and Fujitsu over the years.

In the City

WHO HAS pocketed the £43m paid out last month by bidders Eurasian Natural Resources Corporation (ENRC) for the Zimbabwe sanctions-tainted shares in Central African Mining & Exploration held by the mysterious British Virgin Islands company, Meryweather Investments?

CAMEC, headed by former England cricketer Phil Edmonds, is understood to have informed the Treasury earlier this year that Meryweather was linked to Zimbabwean businessman "Billy" Rautenbach, whose assets are supposedly frozen by UK and US sanctions against the Mugabe regime that he helped and benefited from even before he moved into CAMEC. Though not a director, Rautenbach has since 2006 been the controlling influence at CAMEC through his hold on its crucial cobalt/copper mine in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as well as its Zimbabwe-based trucking lifeline.

Since the bid, ENRC has sought to play down the Rautenbach/Meryweather link while insisting that it will do nothing to breach sanctions. Just how, then, ENRC intends to deal with Rautenbach, who is still the man in Zimbabwe and at the all-important Mukondo mine, remains to be seen.

"We need big bonuses to compensate for the stigma of having big bonuses"

Rautenbach himself denies any links to Meryweather (*Eye* 1246), so that must be true. Yet new information concerning Meryweather and its dealings with CAMEC suggest that Rautenbach may at least have a very good idea as to who stands to benefit from the Meryweather millions.

Meryweather became a major CAMEC shareholder with 7.5 percent in April 2008 as part of a remarkable deal by which CAMEC acquired 60 percent of a promising platinum prospect in Zimbabwe, in return for handing over 215m shares and $5m cash to Meryweather plus making a "sweetheart" loan of $100m to the bankrupt Mugabe regime, who had recently forced Anglo Platinum to hand over the Bokai prospect to the government. Only somebody with a lot of influence with the Zimbabwe ruling circle – the sort that $100m brings – could have pulled off such a deal. Rautenbach certainly has those connections.

CAMEC shares were at that time around 50p – compared with the 20p cash bid from ENRC – so the Meryweather stake was initially worth more than £100m. Meryweather may not have done as well as Mugabe because of the collapse in the CAMEC share price. CAMEC, too, has already had to make a $93m write-down provision, because of the fall in the platinum price, against an asset that cost $389m in shares, cash, costs and loan. There has also been a near $5m provision against loans linked to the platinum project.

Documents disclosed as a result of the ENRC bid for the first time throw some light on who was behind Meryweather and was thus able to pull off such a good deal with the cash-strapped Mugabe ahead of the elections that saw his Zanu-PF forced into sham power-sharing with the opposition MDC.

The platinum prospect was owned by a Zimbabwean company, Todal Mining. Rautenbach became a director of Todal but it is unclear at what stage. Sixty percent of Todal was owned by a BVI company, Lefever Finance. CAMEC bought Lefever from Meryweather. The sole director of Lefever, and who also appeared to sign for Meryweather, was one James Ramsay.

Now that's a remarkable coincidence. For a lawyer named James Ramsay has for many years represented Rautenbach. That James Ramsay is a South African who now lives in Harare but previously lived in Britain. Indeed, so close was he to Rautenbach that in 2000 Ramsay tried to negotiate a deal with Bulelani Ngcuka, then head of South Africa's National Prosecuting Authority, which was on Rautenbach's case for fraud. Billy had fled South Africa the previous year.

After meeting Ngcuka in South Africa, Ramsay faxed a letter from his home in Surrey offering a meeting with the fugitive Rautenbach in Maputo, Mozambique, in order to find "a mutually acceptable solution in respect of all outstanding matters". Negotiations with Ngcuka broke down.

The signature on that letter bears a close similarity to the signature of James Ramsay on the agreement documents relating to Meryweather's sale of Lefever. So were the two Ramsays one and the same? Attempts to contact Ramsay were unsuccessful, although a business associate confirmed that he had passed on a message asking to discuss Meryweather Investments – and whose interests he was representing, if not Rautenbach's.

The timeline in the Meryweather deal documents how events in Zimbabwe moved apace once CAMEC had persuaded American hedge fund managers Och-Ziff to poney up £75m of £100m for new CAMEC shares at 50p. The first subscription agreement, dated 3 March, mentioned only the DRC, not Zimbabwe or platinum. That was still the case when the deal was revised and the price cut from 60p on 27 March. The other mugs in for £25m, such as BlackRock, Capital and GLG, came in on 3 April for the same deal.

Without that £100m, CAMEC could not lend Mugabe $100m. It did not have the cash. The money went directly to CAMEC's lawyers in London. With the money now in the bank, CAMEC could do the deal for the platinum rights.

On 4 April Lefever reached a memorandum of agreement with the Zimbabwe Mineral Development Corporation (ZMDC) – a government entity that now controlled the ex-Anglo prospect. Three days later Lefever agreed to lend the Mugabe government $100m it did not have – to be repaid from the dividends paid to the ZMDC for its 40 percent stake in the mine. No interest or time frame was mentioned, although Lefever may have to pay interest to CAMEC – once it has any earnings from a mine that will cost $260m and two years to develop.

On 10 April Meryweather sold Lefever and its liability to lend the $100m to CAMEC. At this point neither Lefever nor Todal had ever traded and no money had been passed to Mugabe. The next day CAMEC announced the deal and soon after Mugabe had his $100m to spend on buying arms or the election, beating up the MDC, or all the above.

The Ramsay letter and a second Rautenbach attempt in 2005 to buy his way out of trouble with a $100,000 payment to drug trafficker Glenn Agliotti have featured in the ongoing corruption trial of Agliotti's contact, former South African police commissioner Jackie Selebi. Rautenbach testified at that trial last month about abortive meetings with Ngcuka and Selebi by his representatives, but denied bribing either official, saying that he merely want to disprove the fraud charges. Ramsay is on the list of potential prosecuting witnesses against Selebi, who denies the charges.

Rautenbach's testimony was seemingly part of the plea-bargain deal he finally did that allowed him to return to South Africa in September – the same day that the ENRC bid for CAMEC was announced. He is said by CAMEC insiders to have backed the bid. All criminal charges were dropped, Rautenbach pleaded guilty to tax evasion and was fined Rand40m (£3.3m), of which only R10m had to be paid immediately. All his assets in South Africa were unfrozen.

The Ramsay connection is not the only curious factor about the Meryweather stake and the ENRC bid. The 215m shares did not initially accept the bid, which was recommended by Edmonds and accepted by the interests of disillusioned major investor, Israeli Dan Gertler. However, Meryweather accepted along with Och-Ziff and other large shareholders as soon as the deal was announced. Och-Ziff, which had entered into swap agreements involving 116m shares by the time of the bid, looks to have taken a hit of up to £45m but, like everybody else, just wanted out. After all, at one time this year CAMEC shares were down to 2p!

The Meryweather shares were held by two nominee companies – Temple Nominees (115m) and Chambers Nominees (100m). However, this was very recent. Neither company was shown as holding any CAMEC shares in the latest annual shareholding list as at 11 June. The shares had previously not been held in Meryweather's name but in a different nominee linked to CAMEC. Chambers Nominees, although a London company, is controlled from the Seychelles – a jurisdiction not unknown to Rautenbach. When he sold the Sabot trucking business to CAMEC, part of that was owned via the Seychelles. Sabot appeared to be a reincarnation of the bankrupt family-owned Wheels of Africa business which had caused him problems with the South African authorities.

Neither Temple nor Chambers appears to have any connection to CAMEC. However, the letters accepting the bid for the Meryweather shares were signed by the CAMEC company secretary, Philip Enoch. This suggests that CAMEC is well acquainted with the real owners and empowered to act for them. Which would be so if, as is suggested, CAMEC had volunteered to the Treasury that the Meryweather shares were linked to Rautenbach and as such covered by the sanctions freeze.

UK regulations make it illegal for any individual or company to enable anyone on the sanctions list to transfer their assets or access funds. That requirement would catch any bidder, bank or broker or company registrar relating to CAMEC shares, the transfer of which has to be approved by the company. So sensitive is the sanctions issue for ENRC that it has established a special committee to handle all issues relating to CAMEC, Rautenbach and Zimbabwe. It will not say who is on this committee.

The sanctions problem may well explain why ENRC may not yet have received bid acceptance for another 91m CAMEC shares worth over £18m owned by Harvest View, a BVI company with the same address as Meryweather and Lefever, which is indisputably owned by Rautenbach interests. ENRC holds 95.4 percent of CAMEC but will not say whether that includes Harvest View's 3.17 percent. This would be the largest outstanding holding. Minority shareholders now have until next March to ask to be paid. Meanwhile, ENRC is said to be in continuing negotiations with the Treasury and the US Office of Foreign Assets Control as to how to deal with the Billy problem without tripping over sanctions legislation here and in the US.

But might it not have already done so with the mysterious circumstances surrounding Meryweather and its James Ramsay? Has the money been passed on to the hidden Meryweather owners – who may not be so hidden to Rautenbach – or has the £43m been paid into an escrow account pending clearance from the Treasury and Washington? Might that be the reason why Enoch signed for the shares? But how can clearance be given if there is a suspicion that interests close to Rautenbach or other Mugabe sympathisers will benefit? Perhaps, in addition to Ramsay appearing at the Selebi trial, he should also be requested to explain the Meryweather ownership to the UK authorities if Gordon Brown's sanctions regime is not to suffer a severe embarrassment.

'Slicker'

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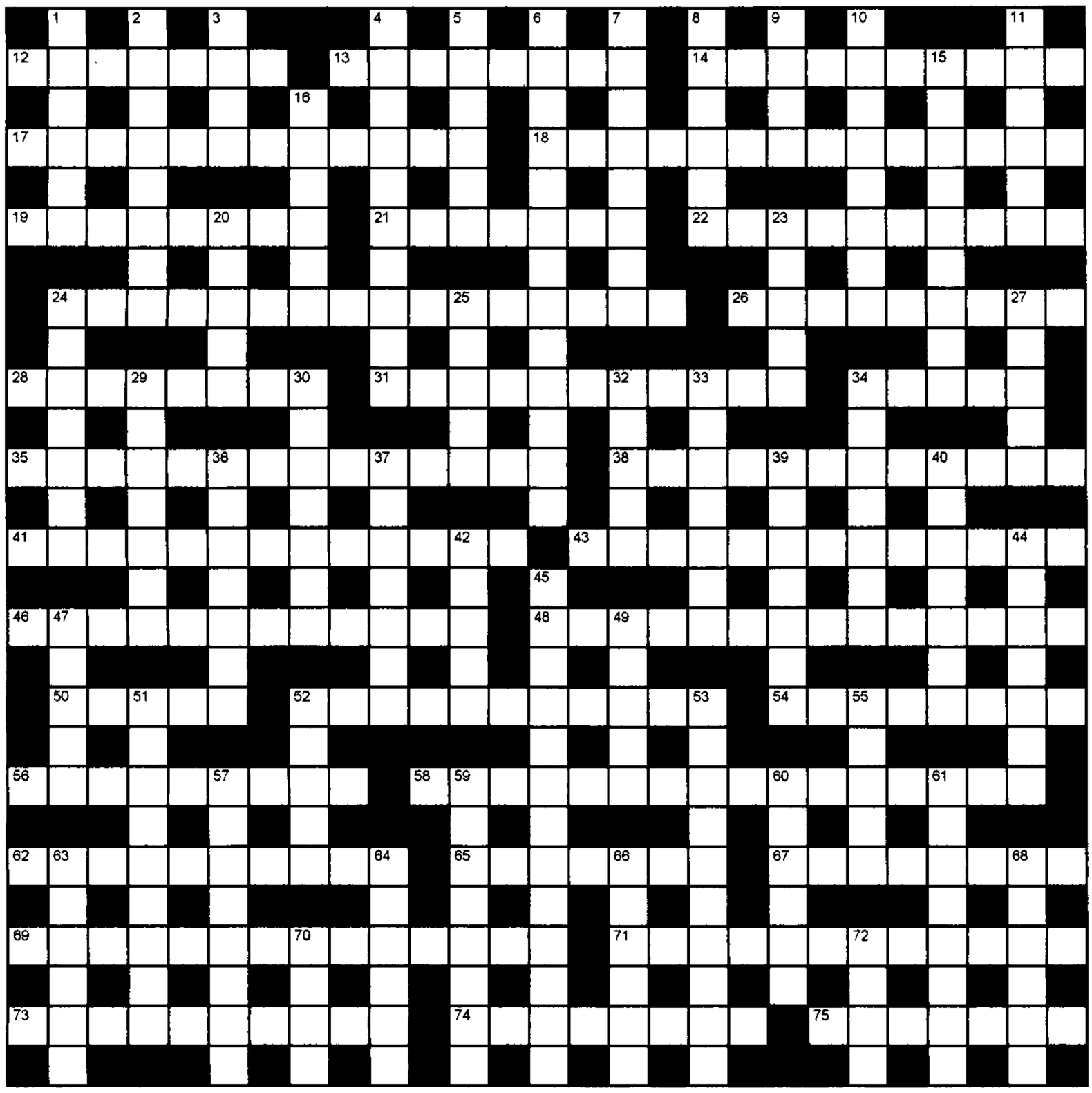

*Clues marked * are questions (many edited for space purposes) featured in 'Dumb Britain' during 2009. Their solutions are the dumb answers given by contestants. Letters used in these solutions (less those letters that cross with normal solutions) are: AAAAAA C D EEEEEEEE F GGGGG H IIIII JJ K LLLL MMM NNN OOOOOO PP RRRR SSSS TTTTTT U W X*

ACROSS

12 * Who wrote *Peter Pan*? (1,1,5)
13 "Reindeers nos. 2 and 3 only must be transported with sleigh!", as the Nazi would say (4,4)
14 * Who's the only original cast member on *EastEnders*? (4,6)
17 * Which British PM was born in Yorkshire in 1852? (3,9)
18 Not wasted, Jagger? Robe's undone after pass at date (5-4,5)
19 Cherie's butt squeezed into kinky leather – like nothing on earth! (8)
21 A mother gets TV presenter very firm (7)
22 PM enemy (lot about) shows what's much in decline under the present government (10)
24 Envy my eco-friendly organ – dead huge! (5-4,7)
26 * What item of clothing is awarded to a sportsman representing his country? (9)
28 Virgin position on *Mail*'s lead press story (4,4)
31 Coupling of politicians – that should attract voters! (5,6)
34 Moralistic author knocking back the drink at work (5)
35 As the white-suited candidate imagined a sleaze-endangered electorate would be? (5,2,3,4)
38 * Which two counties fought the Wars of the Roses? (4,3,5)
41 I rather suspect injury is associated with one high profile deserter of accident scene (7,6)
43 Peacekeeping troops love to be in can – apt not to be broadcast (13)
46 * Which writer based his books on his work as a Yorkshire vet? (6,6)
48 No longer simple, free gin on holiday, so trying as an MP to justify outrageous expenses claim? (10,4)
50 * In literature what male name precedes "Sand" and "Eliot"? (5)
52 * What 'R' is Hillary Clinton's middle name? (11)
54 A whip separating labour's extremes, an unknown, can (8)
56 Stick produced by heartless cur having sex here in France (S and M) (9)
58 Rt Hon pissed with Eurostar – w.e.f. will see an unwelcome development (1,4,3,3,5)
62 Reg involved in Tory party scandal? Meet up! (10)
65 The main pressure on Bill Clinton's lead provided by Cyclops butting in (7)
67 Leader of Tories a joke, getting into extra borrowing from bank (8)
69 He lost his head to a scheming female, Major? Article: "Roll out tits!" (4,3,7)
71 * What surname is shared by jazz pianist Scott and rock singer Janis? (6-6)
73 Form a cordon and get beaten in nuts (5,5)
74 Grasping women shag Leo senseless and get out of bed (4,1,3)
75 * The Speaker between 1983 and 1992 was Bernard ...? (7)

DOWN

1 Muck in behind is above temperature (6)
2 Brown's chief deficiency: needs us to show outcome of fight? (5,3)
3 Our regular columnist's first to get end away, giving head (4)
4 As Maxwell acted, being pissed with duke and *Mirror* chief? (4-6)
5 * Which 'U' is a South American country, capital Montevideo? (6)
6 Not really "parliament" to be dishonourable with an erection (5,8)
7 One getting a bit from Ms Lehmann covered in booze (8)
8 The nation's smear broadcast (6)
9 Too like being astride large hole (4)
10 Large citrus fruit, rum knocked back in rough hut (8)
11 * Which P is Britain's smallest native bat? (6)
15 They might sleep together, using 'Latitude' condoms (4-5)
16 Street shag? Jump passer-by (6)
20 Artist set to be buggered when the sailors get in (5)
23 Rubbished by *Sport*, he would put his foot down (5)
24 Island supplying Viagra, not through storing one in butt (7)
25 Those honoured to take 'E' – like a Teletubby? (5)
27 Have a taste of topless Liberal (5)
29 Trooper employed in Menswear erroneously? (7)
30 One producing correspondence from Maggie (Mon not Thurs) (7)
32 Steeped in sin, Kinnock to make a commitment on paper? (3,2)
33 Novelist taking subordinate role in extreme positions from Kama Sutra (7)
34 One poor sod with no erection, etc. (3,2,2)
36 Totally incapable? Forget having a piss-up here, then (7)
37 Ardent Spike mounting Den (7)
39 Brown, top to bottom, needs princess's backing as means of getting a good reception (7)
40 Sugar trapped in TV scenery? This should make it airtight! (7)
42 Ruddy Gordon's head's in a depressed state (5)
44 "Waffle", aka Geldof, not totally a drip? (7)
45 Criterion a cop "bends": tit-for-tat (13)
47 Hot remnant of topless Dick? (5)
49 Edith, length inside her, is a dish (5)
51 People like Maxwell, from our point of view, pissed on workers, pocketing one load of money (9)
52 Pole stuck in arse by a long-haired follower (5)
53 Phwoar! Tucking into red deer stew ... because the original platter was crap? (2-8)
55 Cringe from objectionable woman, Brenda (5)
57 * What type of cat is said never to change its spots? (8)
59 Off-piste, it's pissed the most (8)
60 * What ballet name is also an instrument used to break open e.g. almonds? (6)
61 Banging on, rigger is transferred (8)
63 Actor means "prick" in Old English (6)
64 Get naked and see about catching mangy pox (6)
66 If, doing a U-turn, senior Conservative leaders get a failed candidate, it's revenue-related (6)
68 Natural party members – vegetables! (6)
70 * Double Gloucester is a type of what? (4)
72 Prince, a tense tosser (4)

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DOWN: 2 Rossini 3 Fear of God 4 Chest 5 Matriarch 6 Debag 7 Seconds 8 Double helping 14 Returners 15 No kidding 17 Arab oil 19 Octagon 21/15A Runny nose 22 Sober.

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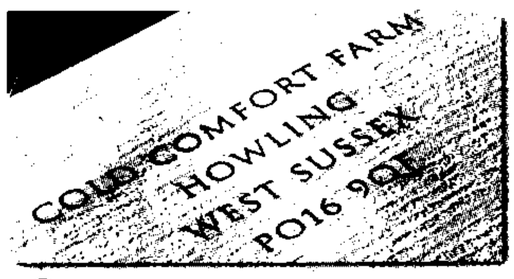

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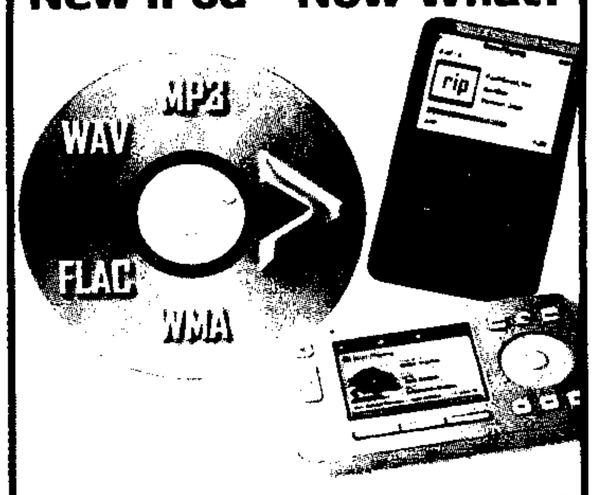

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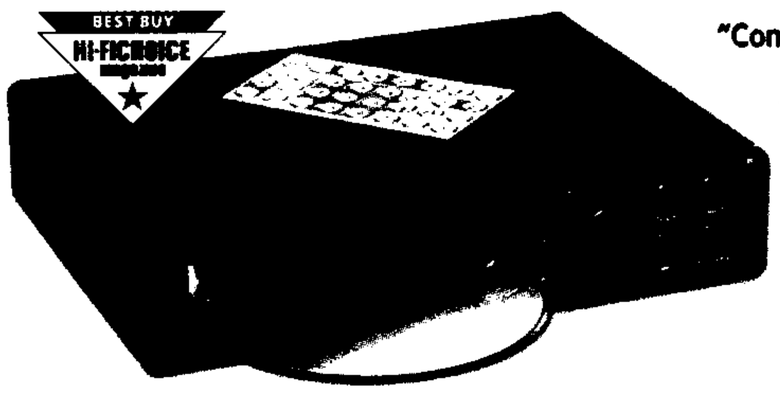

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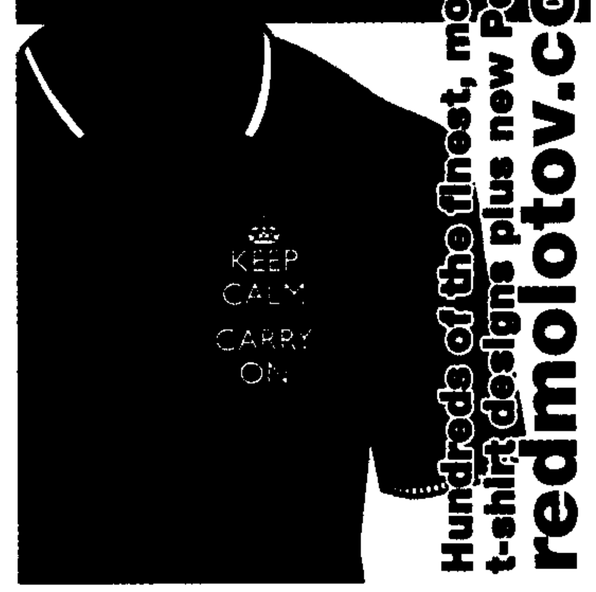

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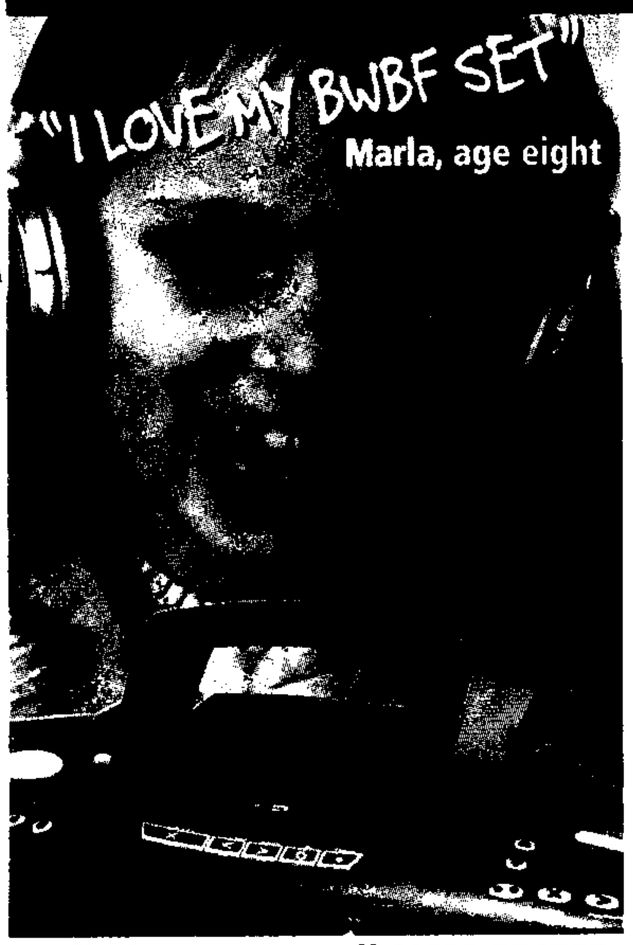

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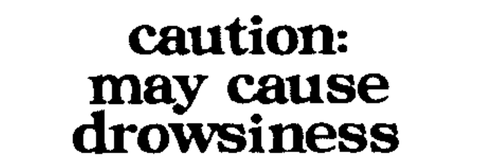

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